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HINDENBURG

HINDENBURG

1847—1934

Soldier and Statesman

by

MAJOR GERT VON HINDENBURG

Translated from the German by
GERALD GRIFFIN

WITH 33 ILLUSTRATIONS

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HINDENBURG

1847-1934

SOLDIER AND STATESMAN

CHAPTER I

*HINDENBURG WOUNDED IN BATTLE FORTY-EIGHT
YEARS BEFORE TANNENBERG*

IT was a proud day for the eighteen-year-old Paul von Hindenburg and his admiring parents when in 1865 he donned for the first time his uniform as a second lieutenant of the Guards, and paraded before the big mirror in the dining-hall of the ancestral home of the Hindenburgs at Neudeck.

Prussia had mobilised against Austria, and the Third Regiment of the Guards was transferred to Potsdam. Second Lieutenant Paul von Hindenburg soon found himself marching against the enemy. On June 28th, 1866, he underwent his baptism of fire in the battle of Soor on the road between Trautenau and Königinhof. On the morning after the battle fifty soldiers were told off under him to inter the dead. He found it a very gruesome and depressing job to collect and bury the corpses of those who had fallen in battle among the waving cornfields. Next day he was ordered to accompany a transport train consisting of sixty carriages laden with Austrian prisoners

destined for Trautenau. He returned again to his company just in time to take part in the decisive battle of Königgratz.

The Prussian Guards menaced the Austrian flank and rear. The Third Regiment of the Guards received instructions to storm the village of Rosberitz which was stubbornly defended by the Austrians. The enemy were fully aware that Rosberitz was the key-point of their position. Hindenburg's company was in a very critical plight. The company commander, Captain von Forbeck, was killed and Hindenburg took the command. He succeeded in storming Rosberitz, but after a fierce fight in the vicinity of the village he was forced to fall back on Chlum. Instructions were given that this village should be held at all costs. Hindenburg's company was cut off from his battalion, but he rallied his scattered men and pushed ahead with determination. Suddenly an Austrian battery loomed up above the tall corn, and poured a hail of grape-shot into the little isolated band of Prussians. A bullet pierced Hindenburg's helmet, grazing his head. He collapsed in an unconscious state, but quickly recovered, and rushing the battery with his men, he captured five cannon. The other three guns of the battery managed to get away in the nick of time.

"It was a proud moment," runs a passage from Hindenburg's memoirs, "when I stood panting among my captured cannon, and bleeding from a slight wound in my head. But I had no time to rest on my laurels. Enemy riflemen, whom I recognised by their plumed helmets, suddenly emerged from the wheat-fields. I beat them off, and pursued them to a sunken road."

Hindenburg was still cut off from his battalion, but nevertheless he made another effort to reach Rosberitz, in the neighbourhood of which the fight was raging fiercely. Strong reinforcements had been rushed up by the enemy

in the hope of recapturing the village. At length Hindenburg succeeded in forcing his way into the narrow streets which by this time were ablaze. A dreadful hand-to-hand conflict ensued.

The following is Hindenburg's own vivid picture of the fight :

“ Although our needle-guns wrought dreadful havoc on the enemy, there seemed to be endless reserves available to take the place of the fallen. It came to a fierce hand-to-hand conflict among the blazing straw-thatched village streets. It was no longer a question of fighting in organised units. It was a case of every man for himself. Prince Anton von Hollenzollern was very badly wounded. Ensign von Woyrsch, who later on became a field-marshal, with a handful of men stood by the wounded prince against terrible odds. We ran great risk of being cut off altogether presently. Austrian bugles rang out from one of the side-streets to our rear, and we heard the booming of their drums, which had a more hollow sound than ours. There was nothing for it but to fall back, as we were also very hard pressed in front. The collapse of a blazing straw-thatched roof across the street amid dense clouds of smoke and shooting tongues of flame saved us from our perilous plight. Protected by this screen of fire and smoke, we worked our way to an eminence just to the north-east of the village. We were stubbornly determined not to yield another inch of ground. Major Waldersee of the First Regiment of the Guards, who was now our senior officer, ordered the last two standards that we possessed to be stuck in the ground, and our ranks rallied around them. Presently reinforcements came up from our rear, and we advanced again to the rolling of drums against the enemy, who was satisfied with having retained possession

of the village. He had to evacuate it very soon afterwards, owing to the general retreat of his army."

After the battle was ended young Hindenburg's head-wound became extremely painful, and the staff-surgeon wanted to send him to hospital. Hindenburg, however, said that he would not dream of leaving the fighting zone for a mere scratch before the Austrians were completely routed. So the staff-surgeon had to be satisfied with dressing and bandaging the wound, and ordering him to wear a cap instead of his splintered helmet during the rest of the campaign.

The following extract from a letter to his parents gives one an insight into Hindenburg's temperament:

"Before the battle commenced, I felt at first a certain elation at the prospect of smelling powder, followed by a sense of nervous dread that, owing to my youth and inexperience, I might not do my duty as a soldier efficiently. But when I heard the first bullets whizzing past I felt a wave of enthusiasm sweeping over me. A short prayer, a feeling of sadness—a I thought of the loved ones at home—and then forward! As I saw the dead and the wounded lying around, my enthusiasm gave way to a strange calmness—or rather an utter indifference to danger. And then after the battle was over my soul was swept by another emotion—a sense of revelation; in a calmer frame of mind I saw the horrors of war in their true perspective. But this is an emotion past my powers of expression—in words."

On September 20th, the victorious troops entered Berlin. Young Paul von Hindenburg was among them, proudly wearing the Order of the Red Eagle of the Fourth Class with Swords, which had been conferred on him for his gallant service at Rosberitz.

After peace was restored the Third Regiment of the Guards was transferred to Hanover, and for some years Hindenburg lived in the huge barracks in Waterloo Place, and conscientiously carried out the humdrum routine duties of his office.

Then came the momentous year of 1870. Hindenburg was adjutant to the first battalion when the war with France broke out. The army marched through the Bavarian Palatinate in sweltering hot weather. Here for the first time Prussian troops marched side by side with South German regiments, their former enemies. They greeted one another with loud cheers. "The enthusiasm is tremendous," runs a passage from a letter from Hindenburg to his parents. "We could not wish for any better propaganda for our political outlook than this war."

On the afternoon of August 18th the Guards first came into conflict with the French. They were ordered to capture the village of St. Privat, which was perched on an eminence overlooking a vast tract of country. The French were strongly entrenched, and their batteries at St. Privat dominated every approach to the village. The French "Chassepot" rifle was superior to the Prussian needle-gun, and had already inflicted terrible losses on our troops before they could use their own weapons. The only way to escape from this withering hail of fire was to come to handgrips with the enemy as soon as possible.

On the day after this engagement Hindenburg wrote to his parents :

"Following up my letter which I wrote you earlier to-day, I want to emphasise once more that, thank God, I am alive to write to you only through a miracle. Our gallant regiment has only just now buried twelve officers and two sergeant-majors. In addition, twenty-three of our officers have been wounded. The two other

HINDENBURG

battalion-adjutants are dead, and the adjutant of the regiment has been wounded, and I have taken his place. Our battalion has dwindled down to two companies which are under strength. It is obvious that God in his mercy has spared me. Neither my commander nor myself have been able to take our feet out of the stirrups all day long."

The commander's horse was wounded in the leg by a bullet, and another bullet passed through Hindenburg's arm. After the battle the iron cross was conferred on Hindenburg.

The Third Regiment of the Guards did not take an active part in the Battle of Sedan, as it was attached to the reserves. On the afternoon of September 2nd, after the capture of Napoleon and of the whole French army, the guards greeted their monarch, who came to review them, with frantic applause.

"It was impossible to make the men keep their ranks," said Hindenburg. "They swarmed round their beloved sovereign, and kissed his hands and feet. This was the first time that His Majesty had seen his Guards since the beginning of the campaign. He thanked us with tears in his eyes for our prowess at St. Privat. It was a rich reward for those terrible hours!"

The German army pressed on ahead towards Paris. On September 2nd, Hindenburg, writing to his parents to congratulate them on their silver wedding, said that, as he gazed on the city, he longed for the day when the Germans would march in triumph through it. But the resistance of the Paris garrison was much tougher than they had at first anticipated. At Le Bourget the enemy made a stand in great force, in repelling which Hindenburg played a very prominent part. As soon as the danger was past

he wrote to his parents to tell them that he had come out of that nocturnal battle without a scratch. In the same letter he informed them with pride that he had become a god-father. "My second orderly, a reservist, became a father recently, and asked me to be the god-father of his child. I wrote to the mother myself, and sent her a christening gift of a golden Napoleon for the baby on condition that the little man would be named 'William.' "

After the fight at Le Bourget the Regimental Staff returned to their quarters, where they received instructions to send one officer and one non-commissioned officer to attend the proclamation of the Kaiser at Versailles. The regimental commander appointed his adjutant, Lieutenant von Hindenburg, and a sergeant, to represent the Third Regiment of the Guards. And so it was that young Hindenburg was one of the hundreds of cheering officers present in the magnificent Hall of Mirrors at Versailles on that memorable January day in 1871 when William I was proclaimed Emperor of Germany.

At length Paris capitulated. On the morning of March 2nd, 1871, Hindenburg rode at the head of a regiment of Hussars through the Arc de Triomphe, and past the Tuileries towards the Louvre. On the following day he took part in the imperial parade of the Corps of Guards at Longchamps. The enthusiasm of the army was beyond description.

In the beginning of June the army returned home, and on June 16th, Hindenburg and his comrades-in-arms marched under the Brandenburg Gate amid the frenzied jubilation of the multitude.

A long furlough which was granted to Hindenburg was a welcome reward for arduous campaigning. During this happy spell of rest he had to recount to his admiring parents and all his friends in the neighbourhood all the details of the strenuous fighting which he had seen.

After his furlough had expired he returned to garrison duty. After some time he entered the military academy in Berlin, where he spent three years, and in April, 1878, he was transferred to the General Staff of the Second Army Corps in Stettin. In his new capacity he had at first very little to do with tactical problems. He was mainly employed in the work of organisation and administration, rather an un congenial job for him, but one which he executed with the conscientiousness and thoroughness which were characteristic of him.

It was in Stettin that he first met Gertrud Wilhelmine von Sperling, the daughter of the distinguished General von Sperling, who, as Chief of General Staff of the First Army, had taken part in the war of 1870-71, and had died soon after it was over. The two young people immediately fell in love with one another, and they were married on September 24th, 1879. On November 14th, a daughter, Irmgard, was born to the young couple; on January 31st, 1883, their only son, Oscar, was born, and on November 20th, 1891, their second daughter, Annemarie, was born.

In May, 1881, Hindenburg was sent to Königsberg as Chief of Staff of the First Division. His divisional commander was the well-known writer on military subjects, General von Verdy du Vernois, who was later on Minister of War. In Königsberg, Hindenburg devoted his attention mainly to the military problem of the defence of East Prussia. He had sufficient time to travel through the entire province to study the lie of the land thoroughly. His studies also took him to the Masurian lake district. In the region later famous as the battlefield of Tannenberg, he examined in detail, in company with his officers, every possible facet of a possible attack on East Prussia by Russia. During the course of long tramps and journeys on horseback, he covered the extensive stretch of swamps and lakes in the Masurian region, and worked out in theory

the whole scheme which was the basis of the annihilation of the Russian army at the Battle of Tannenberg thirty-three years later. He knew the precise boundaries of the Narew swamps near the frontier. Day and night his mind was obsessed by the idea of a Russian invasion of East Prussia, and he conjured up pictures of his divisions marching towards the enemy in such a strategic manner that he could make a twofold envelopment of their forces in accordance with Schlieffen's plan, and annihilate them amidst that vast chain of lakes and impassable morasses. After he had spent three years in studying the tactical and strategic possibilities of the Eastern frontier, he was recalled to do garrison duty again.

A year later he was transferred to Berlin to Army Headquarters with the rank of major. He worked in the department which was under the control of Colonel Schlieffen, who later on became famous as Chief of the General Staff. He was simultaneously attached to Colonel Vogel von Falkenstein's department which was engaged on the details of the new field service regulations.

Schlieffen's strong personality reacted very powerfully on Hindenburg and contributed substantially to the subsequent trend of his theories of warfare. It was Schlieffen's theory that was put into practice at Tannenberg. Like Schlieffen, Hindenburg, too, visualised a Cannæ—the annihilation of the enemy.

In 1887 Hindenburg was appointed to the General Staff of the Third Army Corps. Simultaneously he gave lectures on tactics and strategy at the Military Academy. In 1889 the young Kaiser, William II, appointed General Julius von Verdy du Vernois, who had been Governor of Strasburg since 1887, as Minister of War. One of the first acts of the new Minister was to appoint Hindenburg Chief of the Infantry Department in the Ministry of War. In 1893 he was given command of the 91st Regiment of

Infantry which was stationed at Oldenburg. In 1896 he was appointed Chief of the General Staff at Coblenz at the instance of the commanding officer of the Eighth Army Corps, General Vogel von Falkenstein. Shortly after Hindenburg had been appointed to Coblenz, General von Falkenstein resigned, and was succeeded by the hereditary Grand-Duke Friedrich von Baden. When the latter, after a father's death, succeeded to the grand duchy, he used his influence to have Hindenburg appointed as commander of the 28th division in Karlsruhe. In the summer of 1901 he took over command of the division. Now for the first time, he had command of troops of every branch of the service. In his new role he was specially keen on practical war-efficiency in the training of his troops. During manœuvres he was extremely exacting. Wherever they saw him, both officers and men knew that they had to be on the *qui vive* all the time. Nothing escaped his observant eye. He took a personal interest in the most minute details of military routine. He frequently questioned individual recruits very searchingly and put them through their squad drill.

On January 27th, 1903, the Kaiser's birthday, Hindenburg was appointed to the command of the Fourth Army Corps in Magdeburg. He had now attained the highest rank in the gift of the Prussian Army. His Chief of Staff was Colonel von François, who, later on at Tannenberg, was in command of the First Army Corps, and was superseded in accordance with Moltke's orders by Hindenburg.

When Hindenburg retired in 1911, and took up his residence in Hanover, both officers and men were extremely sorry. He found it very hard himself to sever his connection with the army and with the town of Magdeburg which he had liked very much.

In his memoirs Hindenburg referred to his retirement in the following words :

“I had been making up my mind for some time that I would retire from the army. I had been far more successful in my military career than I had ever dared to hope. There was no likelihood of a war breaking out, and so I considered that it was my duty to give a chance of promotion to younger men, and in the year 1911 I asked His Majesty for permission to retire.”

CHAPTER II

HINDENBURG'S THIRD WAR

HINDENBURG'S home life after his retirement on pension ran its calm and uneventful course. Of his children the only one still staying with her parents was Annemarie, the youngest. His eldest daughter, Ingrid, had been married since 1902 to Herr von Beckhuten, a landed proprietor, who later on became district president of Kolberg. His only son, Oscar, followed in his father's footsteps, had got a commission in the Third Regiment of Foot Guards after he had completed his training in the cadet corps.

Hindenburg's two hobbies in his retirement were the study of military science and hunting. In his study he was frequently found poring over works by well-known strategists and tacticians, or moving little flags, representing various movements and divisions, to and fro across ordnance survey maps.

Even as a young lieutenant he had been an enthusiastic huntsman, but it was not until he was appointed as commanding officer in Magdeburg that he got a chance of indulging with genuine zest in his favourite pastime. Owing to his official position he had the privilege of hunting in the Crown forest near Magdeburg. It was in this forest that he killed his first stag. He also accepted invitations to take part in all the great stag-hunts in the province. He soon became known as a crack shot among all the landed gentry in Brunswick, Dessau and Altenburg.

He frequently went deer-stalking among the Hartz mountains, and occasionally he hunted in the Thuringian forests as the guest of the Duke of Oldenburg.

And after his retirement he invariably took an annual hunting holiday among the Salzburg mountains as a guest of Count Hochstadt. Everybody in the district knew him as a very keen and competent sportsman. He frequently spent hours on end climbing from one mountain crag to another in pursuit of chamois. An old huntsman, who frequently accompanied him on these tramps among the Salzburg Alps, wrote an interesting account of the days he spent among the mountains with him. "During the course of my long experience as a huntsman I have never met with a more enthusiastic and a more determined deer-stalker than General von Hindenburg. No mountain is too steep, no trail is too long for him. It is a positive pleasure to go stag-hunting with him."

Even in his declining years Hindenburg still kept up his old hobby. His house was adorned with numerous trophies of the chase. After he had been elected as head of the State, he made full use of the hunting-box in the majestic Schorfheide forest, which was always at the disposal of the President for the time being. He was acquainted very soon with every path and every rugged peak in the preserve. The rangers knew all the stags in the district, and had pet names for many of them. They had christened one very sturdy and imposing-looking fourteen-year-old stag, "Paul." Then one fine day his namesake fell to Hindenburg's gun. It was only then that the head ranger told the story of the christening of the stag to the President, who laughed very heartily over the incident.

On the outbreak of the World War Hindenburg, who was at the time staying with his eldest daughter in Kolberg,

hastened back to Hanover, and communicated immediately with the Minister of War, placing himself at his disposal. The minister replied with cold formality, that if his services were required, they would let him know in due course. It was rather disheartening to the old soldier to realise that when his country was in danger, the authorities would not forthwith avail themselves of his military skill. A long-standing estrangement between the Kaiser and Hindenburg was responsible for this attitude of the minister. In fact several years before the outbreak of the World War private instructions had been issued to the Ministry that, in the event of war, Hindenburg was not to be placed on the active service list again.

Day after day, during the early days of the war, Hindenburg paced restlessly to and fro through his study, anxiously waiting for the summons from the Minister of War which was not forthcoming. And as he read the news of the great victories on the Western Front he envied his son and his sons-in-law the chance they had of fighting for their country. Still, with his selfless affection for the Fatherland, he was alternately cheered by the victories in the west and depressed by the tidings of disaster from the eastern theatre of war. He could not understand why General Prinswitz did not assume the initiative. He brooded for hours at a stretch over his old maps of East Prussia, every hill and dale, and every pathless tract and quaking swamp of which he could visualise with his eyes closed. It grieved him unspeakably to think that he was sitting helplessly in his study at Hanover, when the authorities might have availed themselves of his expert knowledge of the military problems of the Eastern Front.

As he was having a cup of coffee at 3 p.m. on August 22nd, his mind obsessed with gloomy forebodings about the fate of East Prussia, his wife came into his study and handed him a telegram. It was from Army Headquarters.

They wanted to know if he were ready to take up duty immediately. "I am ready," was Hindenburg's laconic reply. Sheaves of further telegrams arrived. Then came one informing him that Ludendorff would arrive at Hanover railway-station at 3 a.m. next day, and would report to him. A final telegram informed him that he had been appointed as commander of the Eighth Army in East Prussia. He fully realised the responsibility which had suddenly been thrust on him, but he felt quite equal to the task. He was thoroughly familiar with the strategic possibilities of the terrain in which his army would operate. He had never before met General Ludendorff, his future Chief of Staff, but he knew that he had the reputation of being an extremely capable officer. His plucky capture of Liège had made him famous, and led to his being appointed to co-operate with Hindenburg in the task of hurling back the Russian invaders of East Prussia.

It was still dark when at 3 a.m. next day, Hindenburg, accompanied by his wife, drove up to the brilliantly lit railway-station. He had just stepped on the platform when a special train, consisting of a locomotive and two carriages, steamed in. It had barely pulled up, when Ludendorff stepped briskly from his carriage and, coming to the salute, reported to Hindenburg.

"Now we must be off, my dear," said Hindenburg, as he kissed his wife good-bye. "God keep you safe, till I return."

Followed by Ludendorff, he entered the carriage, and the train started immediately in the direction of East Prussia. Day was just breaking.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff spread out a map of East Prussia before them, and discussed the military position as the train thundered along. Ludendorff, who had come direct from Supreme Headquarters, had already thoroughly thrashed out the entire situation on the Eastern theatre of war with Moltke and his staff. He had fully grasped every

detail of the position in that zone of operations. He knew the positions of the various army corps, he knew the direction in which they were marching at the moment, and the positions they would occupy in a few hours' time. He had already despatched from Coblenz the necessary instructions for the movement of the troops. Hindenburg approved of the steps which his Chief of Staff had so far adopted and in a short time their provisional plan of campaign was fully outlined by them. Hindenburg had pondered it many and oft times during the course of a long tour in the strategic possibilities of the battle zone in which they were both interested. The whole region, with its chain of lakes, its swamps and its limitless forest-lands, appeared clearly before his mental vision.

The time for action had come. The situation in East Prussia looked very menacing. Nine German infantry divisions and a cavalry division were facing twenty-six Russian infantry divisions and five cavalry divisions. In other words, the Russians were almost three to one. The advanced portion of Rennenkampf's army had been hurled back across the frontier as the result of a plucky attack by General von François at Stallupönen. Later on the First Corp had to give way before the overwhelming forces of the enemy, and withdrew to Gumbinnen, in the vicinity of which the Commander-in-Chief, von Pritzwitz, had mustered the entire Eighth Army with the exception of the Twentieth Army Corps. On August 20th the battle started afresh at Gumbinnen. General von François was victorious on the north wing, and stayed in the right flank of the enemy. Also on the south wing, which was in command of General Otto von Bülow, the German position was quite favourable.

On August 21st the Third Reserve Division succeeded in driving a wedge through the left flank of the enemy, so that Rennenkampf's army was menaced from the north

and from the south, with the result that both its right and left flanks were in danger. The Seventeenth Corps, under General von Mackensen, which was to hold the centre, was less favoured by fortune. One of its divisions had to give way before a fierce Russian onset. However, in view of the hopeful position of the fight on both wings there was no danger of the battle being lost as a result of this solitary reverse. But the Commander-in-Chief lost his nerve when the news of the advance of the Narew army arrived while the fight was as yet undecided. Prittwitz felt that his rear and flanks were menaced by Samsonov's advance. He was afraid to expose his troops to such risks, and decided to back out of the fight.

On the evening of August 20th he gave orders for a retreat in the direction of the Vistula. He sent a report to the Supreme Command that, owing to the superiority in numbers of the enemy, he was not in a position to defend the territory to the east of that river. The order to retreat came as a complete surprise to the troops who were fighting at Gumbinnen. They could not understand the meaning of it, as they had fully reckoned upon a sweeping victory over the Russians on the following day. Numerically the German forces were almost equal to the Russians under Rennenkampf. The superior leadership and equipment of the German troops would in all probability have led to a German victory at Gumbinnen and to the destruction of Rennenkampf's army, were it not for this nervous collapse of the Commander-in-Chief. But Prittwitz was not the man to take such a risk in view of the advance of the Narew army.

On August 23rd, at 4 p.m., the following wireless message was received at General Headquarters :

" I have taken over the command of the Eighth Army.
VON HINDENBURG."

CHAPTER III

LANNABERG!

WHEN, on the afternoon of August 23rd, Hindenburg arrived at Army Headquarters in Marienburg the army corps had already been marching for twenty-four hours, in accordance with the instructions which Ludendorff had given from Coblenz. Everything was in readiness now for the attack on Samsonov. The Chief of Staff at the headquarters of the Eighth Army, Lieutenant-Colonel Hoffmann, who later on came into great prominence in connection with the Brest-Litovsk negotiations, directed the manœuvres of the corps with great skill, but, for all that, the plight of the army was extremely critical.

It was only with the greatest difficulty that the corps could shake off Rennenkampf's army, which followed it in a rather half-hearted manner after the breaking off of the battle of Gumbinnen. The Russian cavalry squadrons were utterly devoid of fighting spirit. They did not succeed even once in getting in contact with the retreating German troops. Rennenkampf was under the impression that the bulk of the Eighth Army was falling back on Königsberg to hold the fortress.

This mistake on the part of the Russian Commander-in-Chief played splendidly into Hindenburg's hands. The fact that Rennenkampf did not follow the Eighth Army to the south-west, but was marching further ahead in the direction of Königsberg, gave Hindenburg the

opportunity of drawing up two army corps, the Seventh, under General von Mackensen, and the First Reserve Corps, under Otto von Bülow, to the north-east of the line of advance of Samsonov's army, with a view to attacking his flank, while the First Army Corps, under General von François, was to menace Samsonov's left flank. To the front of the Russian centre stood the Twentieth Army Corps, under General von Scholtz, who had so far successfully held up the advance of Samsonov, but now realised that he would have to fall back slowly towards the north before the enormously superior numbers of the Russians.

Samsonov had been planning to make a dash as speedily as possible in the direction of Dantzig, in order to cut off the retreat of the Eighth Army across the Vistula. Hindenburg had deliberately made the German centre as weak as possible. Samsonov was pressing forward all the time towards the north. His vanguard was already almost in touch with Allenstein, where its advance was only challenged by a small force of German Landwehr troops.

But while the Russian army was advancing towards the north, the thunder-clouds were gathering on its two flanks. The Seventeenth Army Corps in conjunction with the First Reserve Corps was facing the Russian right flank, while the First Corps and the Twentieth Corps pressed forward against the left flank. The celebrated "pincers" strategy was about to be put into operation. The enemy was to be annihilated, not merely to be beaten and hurled back. For the first and only time during the course of the World War the famous Schlieffen system was to be put to a test that was destined to end in triumph. Hindenburg was fully convinced that if he did not crush Samsonov's army, an offensive against Rennenkampf's forces would be out of the question. He was now standing on the old battle-field of Tannenberg on which the Germans were defeated

on July 15th, 1410, by the combined Polish and Lithuanian forces.

On the evening of August 25th the advance to the fighting zone ended. The First Army Corps, which had been drafted by rail past Deutsch-Eylau, was stationed to the west of Uslav in readiness to make an attack in an easterly direction upon the left flank and rear of the enemy. It was allotted the task of cutting off the retreat of the Russians southward across the frontier. A heavy responsibility lay on the shoulders of the Commander-in-Chief and his troops. To the north of the First Army Corps was the Twentieth Army Corps, which was likewise to attack the left flank of the enemy who was marching on Allenstein. As a result of the strengthening of the wings, the front facing the centre of Samsonov's army became weaker and weaker. The Seventeenth Army Corps and the First Reserve Corps took Bischofsburg on the right flank of Samsonov's position, so that the German Corps formed a huge semicircle opening towards the south, around the troops that were marching towards the north. The German attack along the whole line began on August 26th.

The Supreme Command had given orders to give battle on the left flank of the Vistula to Samsonov, but of course it was left to the judgment of the commander to decide how he should carry out this attack. The double envelopment which Hindenburg had decided upon could only be successful if Rennenkampf did not swing round southwards, that is to say, if he did not follow up the Seventeenth Army Corps and the First Reserve Corps. And, contrary to expectation, Rennenkampf allowed an excellent opportunity to slip, with the result that Hindenburg was able to put both these corps against Samsonov's right flank. It was a perilous venture. It was typical of Hindenburg's iron nerves that he took this risk in his firm determination to

crush the enemy. The two army corps were between two vastly superior Russian armies which might at any moment simultaneously attack them. As a screen against Rennenkampf's army which was pushing on towards Königsberg, Hindenburg only assigned one cavalry division to cover the rear and flank of his entire force. He needed his very last available man to deal his decisive blow at Samsonov. The fact that he did not even take the most elementary precautions against the risks attendant on a possible change of the enemy's plan shows that he had grimly decided to chance the alternatives of smashing victory or irretrievable disaster.

Scarcely had the two-fold enveloping offensive against Samsonov commenced, when the German troops were faced with a critical situation. Rennenkampf ordered strong cavalry reserves to swing round to the south to ascertain the position of the Eighth Army. As the cavalry bore down on the rear of the left German wing, Hindenburg had to reckon on the possibility at any moment of his own right and left enveloping wings being themselves attacked in rear and flank. While Hindenburg was weighing up the position, a fierce attack was launched on the rear and flank of the First Army Corps by the reinforcements which Samsonov had rushed up from the Russian frontier. The Russians had formed another enveloping army around the army with which Hindenburg had enveloped Samsonov, and, to make the position more perilous, the Russian enveloping army was quite as strong as the German one. The German corps fighting against Samsonov's army were obliged to detail substantial reinforcements to cover their rear. Presently the Germans found themselves fighting on two fronts, sometimes even on all points of the compass in the impassible Masurian wilderness of swamps, lakes and forest-lands. Individual units lost touch with one another. It was only with the greatest difficulty that it was possible to

maintain unified control. It was a situation that demanded a considerable amount of initiative from the subordinate generals. Practically every battalion fought on its own account.

The pressure of the enemy on the ring of German troops which had caught the greater part of Samsonov's army in a "pincers' grip," and was squeezing it into an ever-narrowing compass, was steadily increasing. There was a growing feeling of anxiety at the headquarters of the Eighth Army. Even Ludendorff, the hero of the capture of Liege, nearly lost his nerve. But Hindenburg remained calm. The officers attached to the General Staff urged him to give up the battle in order to save the army. Ludendorff was especially anxious that they should sever contact with the enemy as quickly as possible. Hindenburg, however, insisted on seeing the fight through. He stubbornly refused to countermand any orders that had been issued. "The plan of attack must be executed in every detail," he said. His stoical determination reacted upon the officers at headquarters. The corps which were frequently in very dire straits, were goaded on afresh to make a determined push. For a long time the issue was very doubtful. Even the dashing dare-devil General von François, whose force held the rear of the enemy in the direction of Neidenburg and Willenburg, and had intercepted their communication lines, began to feel very uneasy when wave after wave of Russian troops surged up from the south and dashed against his rear. Hindenburg's poise and coolness had a reassuring effect on him, however, and he braced himself anew for the fray.

Hindenburg's army had barely surmounted this difficulty when it was menaced with a fresh peril. It was reported that Rennenkampf's army was advancing in the hope of rescuing Samsonov at the last moment from the pincers' grip of the Germans. Luckily the report proved

to be false. Rennenkampf was maintaining an inexplicable inactivity in the neighbourhood of Insterburg, while Samsonov's army was menaced with annihilation.

While Samsonov was fighting desperately against a hopeless situation, Hindenburg was evolving plans for an attack on Rennenkampf's army. He felt that there was no time to be wasted, as Rennenkampf might give up his dallying tactics, and might, with the aid of reinforcements hurried up from the Southern Russian frontier, make a desperate attempt to liberate Samsonov. It was absolutely essential to make a clean sweep as soon as possible of the Russians whom he had trapped in the pincers.

On August 29th, Samsonov's army was completely enveloped with the exception of a gap between Ortelsberg and Willenberg, through which two and a half Russian army corps disappeared during the night in disorderly flight, only to fall into a trap set for them. In the triangle formed by Neidenburg, Willenberg and Passenheim the last scene of the terrible tragedy was enacted. Hemmed in by woods, swamps and lakes, they had to surrender after suffering terrible casualties.

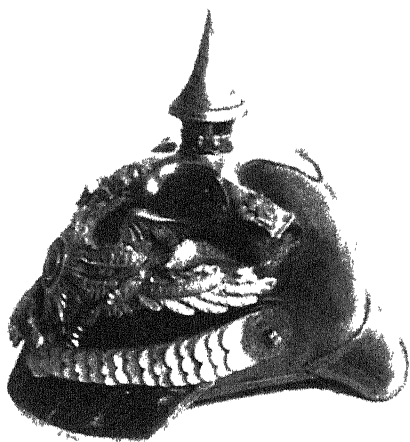
On August 30th, Samsonov's army was already wiped out, when the Russians tried to send up reinforcements from the east and from the south. They were not aware that the Russian army had already been annihilated, and that its ill-fated commander was lying in a desolate corner of the swampy woodland with a bullet through his brain. He had committed suicide rather than survive the destruction of his army. His headquarters staff barely succeeded in escaping across the frontier in the nick of time.

But the destruction of Samsonov's army did not finish the fight. It was possible that the laurels of victory might even yet be snatched from Hindenburg. Several fresh Russian divisions pushed forward from all sides, and the German forces were exhausted after three weeks of

constant marching and fighting in the sweltering heat. The soldiers threw themselves on the ground in a state of utter exhaustion, all gripping their rifles, whenever they got the chance of a few minutes' rest. At night they were only allowed a few hours' sleep, and they had to push on ahead again at break of day.

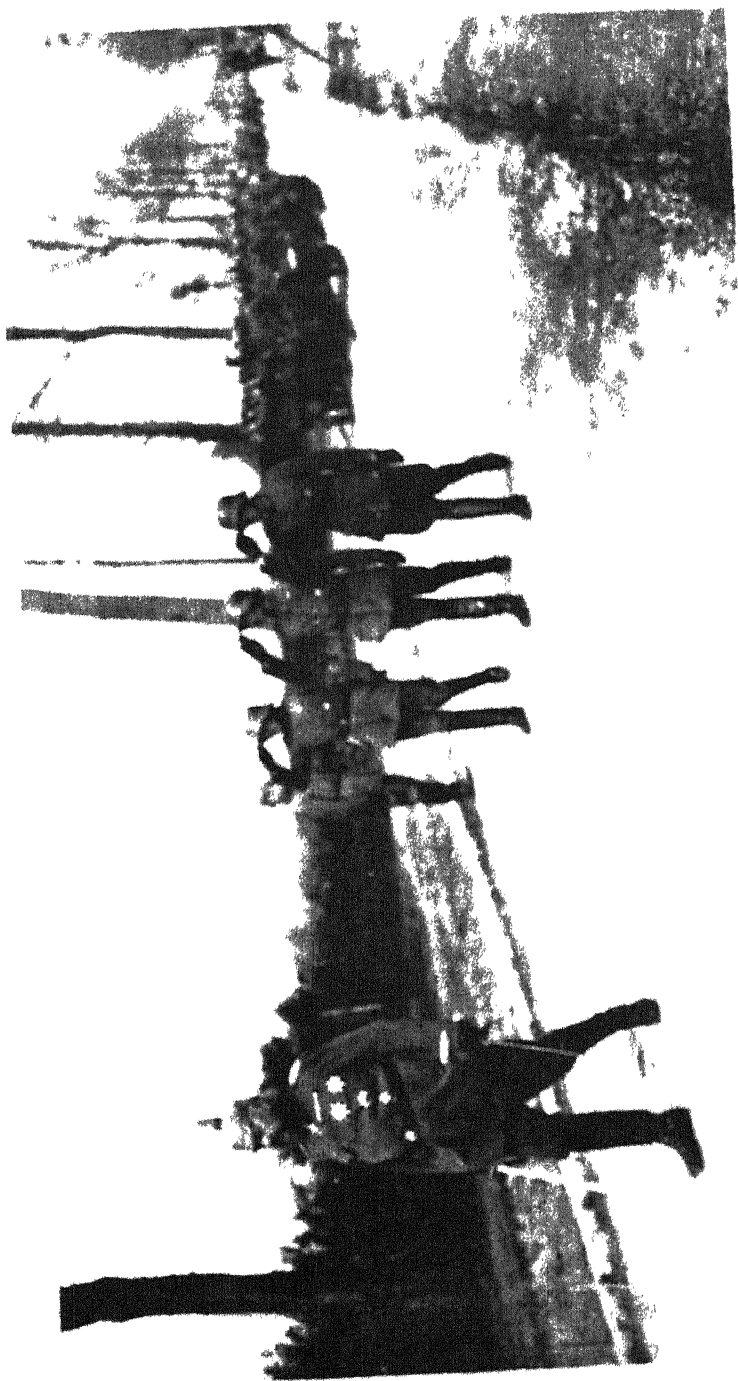
In the limitless wilderness of forest and lakeland, the German army had to be drawn up again according to a new plan. If Rennenkampf or another Russian general should attack the Eighth Army, huddled up as it was in a narrow space, disaster would be almost practically inevitable. Luckily the Russians had not a Hindenburg commanding them. They seemed to have no definite plan of action, and frittered away their energy in counter-thrusts that were repulsed with comparative ease. But it took a considerable amount of work to sort out the intricate and seemingly hopeless mix-up of the German army, and to prepare a new alignment of its divisions.

It was only by degrees that it was fully discovered how sweeping was the victory of Tannenberg. During the course of a five days' battle a great Russian army, certainly only one out of many, it is true, had been annihilated. More than 100,000 prisoners and a colossal amount of war material had been captured. Before the battle there were 60,000 Russians and 1700 guns to cope with Hindenburg's 240,000 Germans and 600 guns. What had seemed impossible a week previously had become an accomplished fact. The soldiers who six days before under the command of Prinswitz had abandoned East Prussia to the enemy and fallen back behind the Vistula under the pressure of vastly superior forces, now stood victorious on the field of Tannenberg, ready for further battles which would clear the Russians for good and all out of East Prussia. They were, to a man, in high spirits and full of eagerness for the fray. They knew that their victory was the result of the energy and



ABOVE: HINDENBURG'S HELMET IDENTIFIED BY A SHILL AT KUNIGGRATZ IN 1868

BELOW: HINDENBURG AS A SECOND-LIEUTENANT IN THE THIRD REGIMENT OF THE FOOT GUARDS



brilliant leadership of Hindenburg, and felt confident that he would lead them on to fresh victories.

Germany celebrated the victory of Tannenberg with carillons of triumph and festive gatherings. Hindenburg's name was on everybody's lips. A holiday was given in all the schools of the country in his honour.

But Hindenburg and his army had no time to celebrate their victory. Their task was only half done as yet. They had still to tackle Rennenkampf. When the Russian general realised the terrible outcome of his dallying policy, he was contemplating a retreat across the frontier with all possible speed. Realising, however, that Hindenburg was preparing to intercept his retreat, he decided to avoid a battle. But Hindenburg was planning not merely to drive Rennenkampf's army out of East Prussia. He was determined to crush his army too. There was no possibility, however, of making a double envelopment of Rennenkampf's army. Instead of trying this manoeuvre again, he decided that he would thrust his right wing with strong supporting reserves against the left flank and the rear of the enemy in the direction of Stallupönen, and that simultaneously he would cut off the possibility of his retreat through the Interburg-Lydkuhnen-Kovno region.

The Supreme Command had suddenly got alarmed about the position in East Prussia, and had sent two army corps and a cavalry division from the west as reinforcements for Hindenburg. This was a disastrous blunder on the part of Moltke, and was the deciding factor which turned the tide of battle against Germany on the Marne. Owing to the withdrawal of those troops from the west the advance on that front was held up. These reserves were not really needed in order to decide the issue on the eastern theatre of war. Hindenburg would have been able to deal with Rennenkampf without their aid.

It is quite understandable that even the most brilliant

commander might make miscalculations, and that he might not grasp every detail of any given campaign. The battle of the Maueran Lakes did not lead to the destruction of Rennenkampf's army. The details of the flight worked out in practice on different lines from those which Hindenburg had planned. The German right wing did not push forward with sufficient speed against the rear and the right flank of the Russians to intercept Rennenkampf's retreat to Kovno. The two cavalry divisions which received the order to advance quickly against the rear of Rennenkampf's army made very slow progress. General von François, who was in command of the First Army Corps, took matters into his own hands, and committed a series of blunders. The advance of the First Army Corps against the only lines of retreat available for the Russians was not carried out according to plan, and valuable time was irretrievably lost. There were some rather warm interchanges between Hindenburg and François in consequence. Had Rennenkampf's retreat been intercepted in accordance with the plan outlined by Hindenburg, the Russian army would have been trapped.

But it was not only on the German right enveloping wing that the subordinate commanders committed mistakes; the centre, too, did not attack with sufficient vigour. The Eleventh Army Corps under General von Plüskow and the First Reserve Corps under von Bulow only tackled the Russians in a very tentative style. Hindenburg had hoped to bait the Russian centre until the German thrust against the right flank and rear of the enemy had developed to Eydtkuhnen. This proved to be a miscalculation. When Bulow was about to attack, because he thought that Rennenkampf was about to fall back, he received instructions from headquarters not to do so. Had a determined advance been made then, according to Bulow's wish, the Russians would have been forced to bring up their reserves

again, which were already proceeding towards the east. At that moment the important thing was to keep as large Russian forces as possible engaged in the centre of the battle zone by a determined German offensive, in order to prevent the Russians from escaping in the nick of time, as they actually did, from being trapped by the German troops who were advancing to cut off their lines of retreat.

After this mistake had been committed, it was impossible to carry out any effective pursuit of Rennenkampf. There was no sense in following on his heels until our forces came within range of the guns of Kovno. Consequently the Russian losses in prisoners and war material were relatively small considering the strength of Rennenkampf's army. But at least East Prussia had been rescued from the grip of the enemy. The inhabitants, who had been forced to flee as a result of the reckless devastation wrought by the Russian invaders, now returned to their homes. For several weeks the Russians had systematically laid waste the country-side. The notorious Cossacks especially set fire to everything that lay in their path. Several towns and villages, as well as country residences, were reduced to ashes in districts which were a considerable distance from the battle zone. But very soon after Hindenburg's victory the last of the marauders had fled across the frontier.

A great strategic victory had been gained, despite the fact that the Battle of the Masurian Lakes did not fulfil the hopes that had been entertained. Rennenkampf's army was beaten and driven out of East Prussia, it is true, but it was not crushed. However, the Russian menace to East Prussia had been repelled.

CHAPTER IV

"THE WAR OF LOST OPPORTUNITIES"

THE enemy had been driven out of East Prussia. One Russian army had been either wiped out or imprisoned, and a second one had been forced to fall back to a position of safety. But the situation on the eastern theatre of war was still precarious as long as Rennenkampf's army stood, even though it had been repulsed, ready at a moment's notice to make an attack on the frontiers of East Prussia. At the same time a new Russian army to the south of the Narew threatened the southern provinces of East Prussia. The balance of power on this zone of war was to a certain extent restored by Hindenburg's victory, but on the other hand the news from the Austrian front was rather ominous. The Austrian army had suffered a heavy defeat, culminating in the evacuation of Galicia. Immediately after the Battle of Tannenberg Hindenburg was convinced of the need of sending help to Austria. No sooner had Rennenkampf been driven out of East Prussia, than the Supreme Army Command instructed Hindenburg to despatch two army corps to the Austrian front.

Field-Marshal Conrad emphasised in his memoirs that an agreement had been made between him and General Moltke at the beginning of the war with regard to the manner in which it was to be conducted. "Austria-Hungary," he said, "undertook the arduous and thankless task of fighting Russia in order to enable Germany to hurl

herself against France with a view to obtaining a speedy smashing victory, on the understanding that Germany, victorious in the west, would take a hand with formidable forces in the campaign against Russia. As Germany was unable to fulfil her undertaking owing to the defeat on the Marne, there was nothing for it but to pay off her debt on the instalment system. But every one of these payments was made in a patronising manner which suggested that Germany was saving Austria-Hungary from collapse. In consequence of this attitude relations were so strained by the time von Falkenhayn became Chief of the General Staff that it took me all my time to maintain a tone of forbearance in order not to jeopardise our co-ordination of action.”

While genuine cordiality prevailed between Conrad and General von Moltke, the relations between the Austro-Hungarian commander and Moltke's successor, General von Falkenhayn, were always strained—an attitude which clashed with the harmonious co-operation in the execution of war plans. Falkenhayn took a cynical pleasure in referring to the Austrian troops as “our weaker brethren,” and in persistently drawing attention to their real or imaginary mistakes and faults. Furthermore he was not a man of prompt decision, and invariably there was a loss of precious time before he made up his mind either to accept or reject the various proposals put forward by Conrad. It was not until Hindenburg was appointed on August 19th, 1916, as a successor to Falkenhayn, that the relations between German and Austro-Hungarian headquarters improved. Hindenburg and Conrad, both men of superior stamp, and both brilliant generals, understood each other and had absolute confidence in each other. “Matters of mutual interest to us,” wrote Conrad, “were promptly decided in our dealings with Field-Marshal von Hindenburg and General von Ludendorff. The result was

that one immediately knew where one stood. Even when there were divergences of opinion between us, our relations were always candid and cordial."

In view of the smashing defeat of the Austrian troops in Galicia, the Supreme Command felt obliged, in Conrad's words, "to pay in instalments" their duty to their ally. And so they hastened to come to the help of Austria-Hungary with the scanty forces that they could spare. In accordance with a request which had been previously made by Conrad to von Moltke, the Chief of the General Staff, Hindenburg proposed that he should force his way southward across the Narew to the east of Warsaw, in order to free the Austrians from their perilous plight. This was a brilliant, and withal a daring scheme. The Supreme Command, however, turned down Hindenburg's bold suggestion and gave instructions to him to make a drive for the Cracow region with his new army.

It was on this occasion for the first time that these divergences of opinion between the Supreme Command and Hindenburg became evident, which recurred only too frequently as the war wore on, and reacted so disastrously on the outcome of the Russian campaign.

Moltke, whose health broke down completely after the calamitous ending of the Battle of the Marne, was superseded on September 14th, 1914, by General von Falkenhayn. This ambitious man met all Hindenburg's proposals with a gruff refusal. As might be expected, Hindenburg would not endure playing a subservient role to the Austrians, and, as the Austrians in their turn declined to play second fiddle to Hindenburg, formidable obstacles were placed in the path of their common cause. Co-ordinated action proved abortive from the outset, through the lack of a unified command. From the very start the fatal dissension between Germany and Austria, which grew worse from month to month, and seriously thwarted

military operations on the Eastern Front, was obvious. The old rivalry between the houses of Hapsburg and Hohenzollern, and their competition for the hegemony of Germany, blazed up afresh. It is true that the old Emperor, Francis Joseph, had, in view of the superiority of the German forces both in numbers and military efficiency, made an agreement with the Kaiser that, in the event of a war, he should have supreme command over the joint armies of Germany and Austria. But, despite this agreement, Conrad von Hotzendorf stood out against such an arrangement, so that to the very end of the war there was no such thing as unified control.

On the Kaiser's instructions Hindenburg resigned his command of the Eighth Army and took over the newly formed Ninth Army, with General Ludendorff once more as his Chief of Staff. The change entailed a considerable extension of Hindenburg's zone of command. The Eighth Army with all the German troops in the eastern provinces and the eastern fortresses with their garrisons were placed under his control. He was now in charge of all the German forces on the Eastern Front. The Eighth Army which confronted Rennenkampf's recently reinforced army, and had charge of the defence of East Prussia, was considerably weakened owing to the considerable drafts transferred from it to the Ninth Army. It became, as the days rolled on, an increasingly difficult task to prevent a fresh penetration of the Russians into German territory. Very soon the German army in this region was in as perilous a plight as it had been before the Battle of Tannenberg. It was menaced by two formidable enemy armies, one facing it, and the other arrayed against its right wing.

Hindenburg proposed starting an offensive right away in East Poland with the Ninth Army which he had drawn up first in Central Silesia, but the Supreme Command

and the Austrians insisted that he should link up immediately with the Austrian left wing at Cracow. Hindenburg protested that such a close massing of forces would debar him from any freedom in manœuvring. But Falkenhayn turned down Hindenburg's bold scheme, which had the annihilation of the enemy as its objective. Hindenburg still protested, but eventually he had to give way, much against his will. As soon, however, as he had established contact with the Austrian Left Wing at Cracow, he advanced along the Vistula towards Warsaw. The Austrians were instructed to take part in this advance, and to secure the Vistula above Ivangorod. The Austrians, were, however, so utterly exhausted that their advance was rather tardy and faint-hearted. They permitted the Russians to cross over to the left bank of the Vistula, and felt that they had not the strength to hurl them back again. And now Hindenburg found himself at the gates of Warsaw, left completely to his own resources, and without any hope of help from the Austrians.

The Russians were massing more and more army corps against him, and soon two hundred and twenty Russian battalions were confronting some sixty German battalions. Nevertheless Hindenburg hoped to attack and inflict a decisive defeat on the enemy despite the latter's vastly superior forces, in the vicinity of Warsaw, the most formidable of Russia's military strongholds, provided the Austrians, in accordance with their promise, would cover the right flank of his army. And although the Russians had already surrounded Hindenburg's left wing he did not give up hope of victory. But when the enemy had forced the crossing of the Vistula at Ivangorod, and consequently menaced the right wing of the German forces, Hindenburg had to give orders to retreat, in order to save his army from imminent disaster.

Hard pressed by the enemy, the German army retreated

ches in a downpour of rain on October 9th
nally unending Polish road leading in the
pper Silesia. The men were utterly ex-
g to their terrible ordeals during recent
hey made very poor headway along the
hich had been quaking miry swamps.

n was now more critical than ever. The
strians had completely broken down. The
inst Warsaw, which had been so carefully
id failed completely. Even the fighting
the Ninth Army had been considerably
d all the time fresh Russian army corps were
on Warsaw. The road to Silesia and Berlin

for the Russian steam-roller. It was a crisis
n nerves of Hindenburg. Would he succeed
German Eastern Front? This was the terrible
c. East Prussia was only protected by the
ghth Army, which had also to fall back,
ly, owing to the overwhelming pressure of
And South-East Prussia was being menaced
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ns now made a bold bid for a decisive blow.
ed all their available forces past Warsaw in
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nce against an enemy so enormously superior
seemed out of the question. Hindenburg
ice that the only way to tackle the Russians
s by offensive, not by defensive tactics. If
ed his troops to dig themselves into trenches,
onslaught would, of course, be stemmed for
ig, but after a while the weakened German
ot be able to withstand the onsets made on
ough Hindenburg had failed to defeat the
open field, he refused now to play for safety,
system of trench warfare which had brought

disaster on Germany on the Western Front. And so once more he made preparation for a decisive encounter.

Immediately after he had crossed the Silesian frontier in his retreat before the overwhelmingly superior Russian forces, he despatched the Ninth Army by rail through Silesia and Posen into the Thorn region. Thereby he came in touch with the right flank of the formidable Russian forces who were swarming westwards. However, a front-line resistance to this overwhelming force was out of the question. If the Russians had made up their minds to continue their advance according to their present plan, they could easily sweep away everything in their path and invade Germany. The industrial region in Upper Silesia was also menaced.

Nevertheless on November 11th the Ninth Army hurled itself from the direction of Thorn upon the right flank of the five-fold strength of the enemy, even though simultaneously its own flank and rear were menaced by new powerful Russian forces. Hindenburg urgently appealed to Supreme Army Headquarters for reinforcements. His appeal once again met with a rebuff from Falkenhayn. Still Hindenburg sent another, and this time a more urgent appeal for help. He was determined at all costs to bring about the complete annihilation of the Russian forces, and thereby to pave the way for a definite decision on the eastern theatre of war.

General Falkenhayn failed to visualise in its proper perspective the goal for which Hindenburg was aiming. He considered it more important to smash right through the enemy lines at Ypres and persisted in the ever-recurring human holocausts, the futility of which was soon apparent. Had the splendid troops who shed their blood to no purpose at Ypres in November, 1914, been used under Hindenburg's leadership for a smashing blow against Russia's overwhelming forces, the World War, in spite of the Battle of the

Marne, which Herr Gotheim, the Reichstag deputy, had even then termed "the end of Germany," would probably have taken a different turn, because Russia would probably have sued at a much earlier date for a separate peace.

The fact that the Supreme Army Command so utterly failed to appreciate the brilliant leadership of Hindenburg in East Prussia was a terrible tragedy. Although the Western Front was then quite able to supply the troops who were needed for the east, in order to bring about the complete overthrow of Russia, Falkenhayn refused to give the necessary reinforcements to the saviour of East Prussia. He asked what was the practical result of the Battle of Tannenberg, and Hindenburg's other great victories? After all, they were just partial successes; they served merely for the purpose of warding off the onslaughts of the Russians, but they were utterly unavailing for the purpose of bringing the World War to a successful issue.

In spite of the numerous German victories on all fronts, in spite of the fact that the German troops were still firmly entrenched in the very heart of France, the year 1914, taken all round, was an utter failure, partly owing to the defeat of the Austrians by the Russians in the battles of Lemberg and Ravaruska, but far more owing to the blunder made by the Supreme Command at the Marne—a blunder which reacted disastrously on the ultimate fate of the war. The fundamental principles underlying these two decisive battles, their significance and their consequences, were utterly different. Lemberg was a bad reverse, but the precipitate order for a retreat issued by Lieutenant-Colonel Hentsch at the Marne ended all hopes for a victorious end to the war. It meant the collapse of the "Schlieffen Plan."

"The Battle of the Marne had to be fought out to the bitter end," said Field-Marshal Conrad. "There could be no respite for that battle, for on its result the ultimate fate

would be equally fatal to Germany's hopes of a successful military grounds. A similar situation was also emphasised, almost *ad nauseam*, by the German press if she were involved in a war against Russia. The decision with all possible speed to make a dash for the East. In accordance with his plan of strategy, Hindenburg made on the Western Front a tactical withdrawal, which on the Western Front, it may be said, he never adhered to. But even after this tactical retreat, the German army committed on the Western Front was not to be considered degenerated into a mere war machine. It was still in accordance with Schlieffen's plan, even if it was not the result of gravity of the situation. The German troops should have been able to break through the Russian frontiers. By skilful tactical manoeuvring, they could have taken offensive defence, and as Hindenburg put it, they could have Russia's millions with him, thereby making a dash for the forces, the French might have been able to break through the German frontiers, and a decisive battle could have been fought on the Russians in the west of the Vosges.

Even in 1917 the decision to make a dash for the East, which was a tactical withdrawal, was not a mistake. It is true that it would have been a tactical withdrawal, but it was a tactical withdrawal, and would have been a tactical withdrawal. Hindenburg once more talked of a dash for the East. The result was that Hindenburg had to be satisfied with doing his best to weaken the Russian army by means of the In the beginning of February he announced the French Russian Army which had broken into East Prussia. Again he successfully adapted his "plan of strategy" to the turning of both flanks of the enemy. Once more in the woods near Augustowo ~~the~~ Russian prisoners fell into the hands of the German troops. But no tangible results accrued from this military exploit carried out under most difficult conditions in an icebound and snow-clad region.

It is true that for the time being it relieved the pressure on the German defence, but it was utterly ineffective of the purpose of putting the Russian bear out of action.

The more the war dragged on, the less effective became the fighting power of the Austrian troops, among whom the disintegrating influence of political bickerings became more and more menacing. The Czech regiments, first-rate fighting materials in themselves, proved to be utterly unreliable when used against the Russians. Hindenburg knew the Austrians well enough by this time to realise that they would not stick it out much longer. And so he appealed once more to Falkenhayn.

At length the Supreme Army Command listened to Hindenburg's persistent pleading, and decided on a big offensive against the Russians with a view to relieving their Austrian allies. On May 2nd, the Germans broke through the Russian lines in Northern Galicia. Everybody was talking about Tarnow and Gorlice. Falkenhayn had merely visualised the driving back of the enemy, but did not entertain the idea of a decisive engagement. But the psychological reaction to the initial successes was tremendous, and the Supreme Army Command awoke to the necessity of sending further reinforcements to this sector of the eastern theatre of war. The German onset swept past Lemberg and penetrated without a halt in a northerly direction between the Bug and the Vistula. The Russian Southern Front was completely broken. But once more the Russians made a stand between the Vistula and the Pripet marshes. Now was the time for an overwhelming offensive from the north against the rear of the enemy's main forces. The campaign might have wound up in a few weeks after a crushing drive against the Russian lines. After he had captured the northern Russian army in February, Hindenburg had made plans for an offensive of this type across the Narew in a southern direction, while

simultaneously another offensive should penetrate from the south to the north with a view to imprisoning the main Russian forces in a pincers' grip. But once again his proposal was not entertained. The collapse of the Russian southern wing which followed in May made the position even more favourable for the German troops. Hindenburg was now in favour of making an overwhelming offensive through the Ossowiez and Grodno region. It seemed to Falkenhayn, however, that it would be far too risky a venture, and he was in favour of making an attack across the lower reaches of the Narew. Hindenburg submitted with reluctance to the orders of the Supreme Command, but Ludendorff would not give way to Falkenhayn so easily. There followed another fierce interchange of mutual recriminations between the Chief of General Staff and the Eastern Front Headquarters. In consequence of the offensive started over the lower Narew against Hindenburg's wish and in accordance with the instructions from headquarters, the Russians had ample opportunity to escape from the menace of being surrounded, without suffering any losses worth talking of in the process. They vanished into the limitless expanses of the Russian waste so dreaded by strategists. And so once more German blood had been poured in torrents without any tangible results.

Still Hindenburg would not admit defeat. He once more pleaded to be allowed to push on past Kovno towards Vilna, in order to drive the Russian centre into the Pripet marshes. He was convinced that if he could effect this *coup*, the line of retreat of the main Russian forces would be cut off. But Falkenhayn held quite a different view, and insisted upon an immediate front-line offensive against the enemy. The pursuit was soon held up with the result that the Russians were able to retreat without hindrance. At length, after the fall of Kovno, Hindenburg

was permitted to deal the blow, the urgent need of which he once more emphasised, but now the reinforcements which were essential for its success were not available. The decisive stroke had to be made with utterly inadequate resources. And so yet again the Russians were able to make use of the expenses of the east. But Hindenburg's cavalry were close on the rear of the retreating Russian army. The knife was already touching the very life artery of the enemy. The vital communication lines between the Russian army and Russia were about to be severed, when the pursuit had suddenly to be held up because reinforcements did not arrive in time. The Russians whom Hindenburg had trapped escaped once again. And this meant that the war on the Eastern Front was virtually lost. The Russian Front now settled down for hundreds of miles in the immobile stagnation of trench warfare. Both soldiers and headquarters staffs along the whole Eastern Front sank into the lethargy of their winter sleep.

In October, 1915, Hindenburg transferred his headquarters to Kovno. This gives one an idea of the vast extent of territory that had to be reorganised immediately on an administrative and economic basis—a task which, of course, entailed very intensive work. The consequence was that the two most efficient military geniuses whom Germany possessed at this period when she was engaged in fighting for her very life, had to remain in utter inactivity for several months. No doubt the administrative work that had to be undertaken in the north-eastern zone of war was by no means a trivial task, but the time of two generals like Hindenburg and Ludendorff should not have been frittered away on it. It was a task that could have been just as efficiently executed by competent civil servants.

Once more there was a bitter interchange of despatches between Hindenburg and Falkenhayn. Hindenburg



DURING MILITARY MANOEUVRES IN LOWER FRANCONIA
A Königshofen scene



HINDENBURG AND HIS WIFE

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accused Falkenhayn, and very justly too, of having prevented a decisive engagement in the east. Falkenhayn, however, took refuge behind the Kaiser, and replied in the following words to Hindenburg's reproaches: "Much as I regret that Your Excellency should have selected the present crisis for gratuitous recriminations about incidents that belong to the past, and that consequently have no bearing upon present conditions, I would not trouble to repudiate your charges, if they only concerned myself personally. However, as they involve a criticism of measures adopted by the Supreme Command, which in all cases had the approval of His Majesty, I am forced to answer you. The question whether Your Excellency approves of the policy of the Supreme Command, does not merit any consideration after His Majesty has given his decision on that policy. Under the circumstances the various constituent sections of our fighting forces must submit unquestioningly to the decrees of the Supreme Command."

For the time being Hindenburg felt that it was hopeless to think of a new offensive on a large scale on the Eastern Front. He was exceedingly worried over the fact that the attack at Verdun, where the last German troops were being sacrificed, was making no headway, and that, nevertheless, the Supreme Command could not be prevailed upon to give up this senseless campaign of attrition tactics. But the inferno of Verdun kept on devouring hosts of troops. The Eastern Front was becoming weaker and weaker owing to the drafts despatched from it to Verdun. The result was, that when the Russians opened an offensive in the middle of March, 1916, at Lake Narocz, there were only seventy German divisions to face the onset of three hundred and seventy enemy divisions. Mounds of corpses kept piling up in front of the German lines. But notwithstanding their tremendous superiority in strength, the

Roumania did not gain one foot of territory, and ceased their offensive after a few days. It would not be too high an estimate to say that the Russians lost 200,000 men. But even so it had convinced Hindenburg that the Russians had still considerable available fighting forces, and that the greatest vigilance was imperative.

On June 21, 1916, came the alarming news that the entire Austro-Hungarian Front in Wolhynia and Bukovina had given way before the Russians. The defeated troops fell back in utter disorder. Whole divisions, especially those consisting of Slav regiments, deserted to the enemy. The Czechs abandoned the Austrians practically in a body. Luck's 9th Hindenburg Front remained unaffected by this terrible crisis, but there were no German troops available to remedy the position in Wolhynia and Bukovina. And still the very best German troops were being sacrificed in a fruitless struggle at Verdun. Hindenburg was forced to despatch every soldier that he could possibly spare to reinforce his own poorly manned lines to save the Austrians from destruction.

But what others even worse, it was just at this terrible crisis that the French and English launched an offensive on the Somme in overwhelming numbers. And still the best troops of Germany were perishing at Verdun. The position became more and more menacing as the days rolled on. A breakthrough by the enemy on the Somme was barely prevented by rushing up the last available reserves. But at any moment the German Western Front might crumble up. Hindenburg and Ludendorff were twice summoned to the Kaiser's headquarters at Pless to discuss the military situation. Hindenburg was given Supreme Command over the entire Eastern Front right down as far as Lemberg. This entailed the transference of his headquarters from Kovno to Brest-Litovsk.

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Hindenburg succeeded in steadying once more, at least to a certain extent, the position on the Austro-Hungarian Front. But just then came another blow from fate. Roumania declared war on Germany.

CHAPTER V

THE PEOPLE'S HERO

THE Russian victory made Hindenburg the hero of the German people. Both his fellow-citizens and his soldiers looked to him to save Germany. The longer the war dragged on, the more insistent became the demand that he should be given supreme command of the fighting forces. And when the Kaiser, at length, though unfortunately too late, parted with Falkenhayn, the only person that was considered even for a moment, as his possible successor, was Hindenburg.

But it was not merely his outstanding victories that accounted for Hindenburg's popularity. His sedate, serious and equable temperament brought everyone who came into personal contact with him, under his spell. The love and reverence of the army and of the people for the Field-Marshal was shown daily in thousands of letters and demonstrations. Soon in every town—nay, in every village, there was an iron statue of Hindenburg. Since the Battle of Tannenberg his person embodied the confidence of the Germans in a victorious finish to the World War. They all had confidence in Hindenburg—they all turned to him with their troubles. Everybody who had anything on his mind, unburdened himself to him, and asked him for advice and assistance. His aides-de-camp had to work overtime in order to open and read the countless letters that were addressed personally to him. As far as time permitted him, Hindenburg

glanced through the letters himself, and dictated the answers, and from one of these answers, the correspondents always knew whether Hindenburg himself or one of his aides-de-camp had dictated the replies. Hindenburg's own answers always had the stamp of a warm heart and of an intense humanity. And it was precisely owing to the fact that he was not avid of popular applause, and because he never asserted himself, but always kept modestly in background, that the reverence of the people for him increased. "I am quite indifferent what the opinion of people about me is," he said once, "provided I can help my king and my Fatherland."

The same modesty was characteristic of all his official announcements. When he won a great victory he did not describe it in vainglorious phrases. The languages of his despatches was concise and serious. The greater his successes, the more humbly did he attribute them to God's grace. He always thanked him for all his victories.

After the decisive victory of the Masurian Lakes, he inserted in the order of the day the following address to his soldiers: "Give all the honour to God! He will help us still further!" On the same day he sent this reply to a message of congratulation: "I thank the Lord God and my brave troops for our successes." He never claimed any personal credit for a victory.

When, in the autumn of 1914—it was then thought that the war would soon be over—people asked him what he contemplated doing when peace came, and pointed out that he might expect the highest military office within the gift of the Fatherland, he said modestly that when the war was over, there would, no doubt, be very good positions for victorious generals. When asked whether he would accept the post of Chief of General Staff, if it were offered to him, he replied: "We have an excellent Chief of the General Staff already." Asked further whether he would

accept the office of War Minister, he replied : " What ? Is it in order to keep eternally wrangling with the Reichstag ? No, thank you. When the war is over, I shall retire once more to Hanover on my pension. Let the younger fellows have these jobs. At my time of life there is nothing so delightful as the feeling that I can retire after having finished my work, and make way for youth." He refused to entertain the idea of literary activity after the war with a view to describing his victories. He said that the utmost he would do in that line would be to write his memoirs, in order, he said, to leave to his children a memento of the Fatherland. He declared, however, that these memoirs would not assume the proportions of a great literary work. He had rather a poor opinion of literary generals. " There is a fundamental difference between word and deed," he said. " A general should be a man of deeds."

Hindenburg was never weary of pointing out the outstanding fine traits in his soldiers, to which he declared he was indebted for his victories. " It is truly a great pleasure to be at the head of this army," he said, when he was in command of the Eighth Army. " Every member of it is a hero, and its spirit is superb. Officers and men are all alike quite confident of victory."

Despite his innate kindness of heart, Hindenberg was devoid of any mawkish sentimentality with regard to warfare. " War cannot be waged on sentimental lines," he said. " The more pitilessly a war is waged, the more merciful it is in reality. A war will end all the sooner by being ruthlessly conducted." He considered that in warfare there was one objective—and one objective only—the crushing of the enemy. That objective had to be attained. A war conducted on flabbily sentimental lines was utterly illogical.

During the lulls between the battles the Field-Marshal

often spoke with deep appreciation and gratitude of his old military teachers and superiors, to whom, he said, he owed a lot.

The tributes which were paid everywhere to Hindenburg were innumerable. He was made an honorary citizen of most of the German towns, and streets and squares were named after him. And just as after the Franco-Prussian war Bismarck oaks were planted everywhere, the oak now became the emblem of the nation's gratitude to Hindenburg. The faculties of the German seats of learning vied with one another in conferring distinctions *honoris causa* on him. And the letters in which Hindenburg expressed his gratitude for these honours were always couched in terms of self-depreciation—a self-depreciation that was genuine, and was not merely assumed for effect. When he was made an honorary citizen of Hanover, he expressed his gratitude to the Mayor and corporation of that city in the following words: "The confidence and good-will displayed towards me everywhere touch me more deeply than I can express. The only reply I can give to these universal expressions of appreciation is that I have merely done my duty to king and to my Fatherland. And for any successes that I have attained during the discharge of my duty I thank God's gracious guidance and my imperial master who entrusted me with my present task. I also thank my faithful colleague, Ludendorff and his fellow-officers, and my soldiers who have displayed incomparable endurance and bravery. And when you take into account the support I have received from all these sources, you will see that very little credit is due to myself."

Even during the course of the war Hindenburg took an active interest in the social welfare of his soldiers. He did his utmost to see that the anxiety of his men with regard to their families which were faced with great privation at home

should be alleviated as much as possible. He was always obsessed by the thought that the smaller tradesmen, mechanics and manufacturers ran great risks of losing all they possessed, and of finding themselves reduced after the end of the war to the position of journeymen labourers. Such was his solicitude for the future economic welfare of the rest of his soldiers who were drafted from the middle classes that he appealed personally on their behalf to the Imperial Chancellor, as well as to the various government departments and to all the members of the Cabinet in the following terms: "A general who is interested in the welfare of his soldiers cannot help feeling anxious about the serious troubles that confront them. I therefore feel very deeply that it is my duty to draw attention to the dangers that lie ahead in this direction, and to urge that timely remedial measures should be adopted. The sense of duty and the death-defying self-sacrifice of our armies demand from our civilian authorities an equally generous appreciation. The physical endurance of every individual soldier, which is fundamentally essential, not merely to enable him to stand the strain of warfare, but also ensure a decisive victory, demands, as an indispensable preliminary, that he should feel that those whom he has left at home are being properly provided for."

On April 8th, 1916, Hindenburg celebrated at his headquarters in Kovno, the golden jubilee of his military career. He replied to Ludendorff's congratulations in a speech in which he extolled the self-effacing co-operation which he received from his fellow-officers under most trying circumstances. He said that Ludendorff was "his dear, faithful colleague and adviser," and added that history would record full details of the great part which he played on the Eastern Front. He also paid a tribute to his other colleagues and to the self-sacrifice and valour of his troops.

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On this occasion Prince Henry conveyed the greetings of the navy to Hindenburg, and Colonel-General von Eichhorn congratulated him on behalf of the troops under his command. "I glean from your message," said the Field-Marshal in reply to him, "that the relations between me and my soldiers are as they should be—love for love, trust for trust—relations which are bound to ensure victory." In the orders of the day also, Hindenburg expressed heartfelt gratitude for the tributes paid to him by the soldiers.

As an old soldier Hindenburg would not listen to any talk about war-weariness. It was easy to say later on that Germany might at that time have been able to bargain for an honourable peace with relatively small sacrifices of territory, and that the dogged tenacity of the Supreme Command and a tendency to overestimate their own strength and resources caused us to ignore the possibilities of favourable peace overtures, and paved the way for the disastrous Treaty of Versailles. However, this was a matter for the Kaiser and the civil authorities to decide. In December, 1917, Hindenburg said to a deputation of newspaper proprietors and journalists: "Let us not talk so much about peace. Victory is the only way to peace. So it was in the east, and so it will be on all fronts. Victory and peace are both assured, and they will come all the quicker, the more we are united at home, and the more stoically we endure what we have to endure. We are assured of victory in the field, and although we still have big and heavy tasks before us, we shall fulfil them with the help of God. Let us keep our courage, as befits Germans and Prussians." On another occasion he said: "Deeds are far more weighty than words. Therefore we should for the moment talk no more about peace. Let us just be steadfast and strong, and peace will come of its own accord." And he gave this solemn warning to the

representatives of the civil authorities : " No man in the Reich should fail us when blood is being shed at the battle-fronts to decide the future of our Fatherland, and the future of us all."

About this time the first whisperings were heard of rumours that even the Supreme Command no longer really had any hopes of victory. It was even alleged in many places that both Hindenburg and Ludendorff had stated that the nation's military strength was fast ebbing and that its economic breakdown was imminent. The Chief of General Staff issued the following protest against this misuse of his name and Ludendorff's : " I have been informed by the Minister of War that unauthorised individuals have broadcast a rumour that both myself and General Ludendorff have stated that the imminence of economic collapse and the exhausted condition of our military resources are forcing us to sue for peace at any price. I will not permit our names to be associated with baseless rumours of this type."

Hindenburg's confidence in victory may have been a mistake, but then a general is not a politician. As long as the fight goes on, as long as there is the faintest hope of victory, it is his duty to keep up the fighting spirit of the troops and of the civilian population.

When late in the summer of 1917, President Wilson sharply criticised Germany's internal policy, vehement protests were made by influential sections of the German people against this unwarranted interference of the American authorities in their affairs. National indignation about Wilson's contentions found vent in hundreds of protests addressed to Hindenburg. He answered a letter in this vein sent by the Lübeck merchants in the following terms : " It gives me special satisfaction that the merchants of the three Hanse towns have given me a very spirited reply to Wilson's effort to drive a wedge

between the German people and their Kaiser and Government."

To the protest he received from the Württemberg Chamber of Commerce, Hindenburg replied: "The German people have countered President Wilson's arrogant words by standing staunch and united in support of their Kaiser and his advisers, and have definitely forbidden any foreign intervention in their affairs."

And in a letter to the Cologne Chamber of Commerce he wrote: "Wilson has only succeeded in uniting the German people in repudiating definitely his clumsy attempt to sow the seeds of dissension amongst us." In reply to another letter of protest, Hindenburg described Wilson's note as an insult to the German people.

In this way he constantly strove to maintain internal harmony in Germany. "We want no internal dissension!" he wrote in September, 1917, to the founders of the Fatherland Party. And later on when he was President of the Reich, he always appealed for unity and solidarity among the people, as he was fully convinced that only by close co-operation could Germany find a remedy for her formidable political troubles. And as he had built the "Hindenburg Line" on the Western Front during the war, he did his utmost in peace-time for the construction of another "Hindenburg Line" of co-operative work for the rebuilding of Germany.

Whenever he got the opportunity Hindenburg strove to stimulate the zeal of the civilian population with rousing words. He was only too well aware that the political and economic condition of Germany was becoming more menacing from day to day, that the people at home were getting weary of the war and of the privations they had to face, and that their sole obsession now was the longing for peace. Strong forces were at work to fan this internal discontent, and even to spread disaffection among the

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oops Spartacus was gaining ground daily, and was becoming bolder and bolder in his methods of propaganda. Hindenburg had absolute confidence in his front line soldiers: their discipline, devotion and courage were magnificent. But he was uneasy about the attitude of the German people. In September, 1917, he urged the Chancellor of the Reich "to impress on all civilian authorities the seriousness of the position, and to urge them to do their utmost to secure adequately nourishing food for workers in war industries, and to rally outstanding personalities among all parties as leaders of the home army behind the plough and the vice, in order to rekindle the *alter Teutonus* in the homeland among the peasants as well as among the industrial workers and among the town-dwellers generally."

The old warrior was rather sceptical about the genuineness of the grandiose talk about everlasting peace, international courts of arbitration and a friendly understanding among all nations. He always regarded war, however, as a last resort, not as something that was in itself meritorious.

"He who knows what war is, yearns for peace," were the words he wrote in a friend's album. He did not think, however, that the world was yet ripe for universal peace. In the course of a conversation with an American in December, 1916, he said: "Every practical method which aims at making wars more rare through the medium of appealing to reason instead of arms, should be sympathetically considered and supported. But any government which, basing its hopes on such a panacea, allows itself to be lulled into a position of fancied security, and depends upon the practical application of pacifistic theories about everlasting peace, and consequently, neglects to make preparations for the defence, the rights and even the existence of its people, is guilty of a dreadful crime against that people. No people with a drop of manly blood in its veins

and with any sense of honour, will ever consent to entrust its existence and its national honour to any court of international arbitration. There will always be a limit beyond which no league of peace can be operative." It speaks well for an old soldier trained in the warlike tradition of Prussia that he should express himself thus, and should emphasise the desirability, where there was a possibility of an appeal to reason, instead of arms.

The sense of duty and the discipline which Hindenburg displayed himself, he also demanded from others. "The welfare of the community and of the Fatherland is of more importance than that of the individual," he said. "A German is ready to sacrifice himself nobly and of his own accord in the interests of his nation." He very strongly criticised the efforts of certain sections of the populace to secure special consideration for themselves during the war years. He protested very passionately when the workers tried to improve their economic condition during the war through the medium of strikes. He would not admit that inadequate food was sufficient justification for going on strike at a time when the country was in danger. A strike he regarded as "an inexcusable weakening of our powers of defence and as an inexcusable crime against the army, especially against the men in the trenches, whose life it menaces."

The regard which Hindenburg enjoyed among all the German people found a very remarkable expression on the occasion of his seventieth birthday on October 2nd, 1917. He had transferred his headquarters to Bad Kreuznach about this time. On September 9th, he had issued an official appeal to his fellow-countrymen not to hold any celebrations on his birthday. "From many indications," he said, "I can see that there is an idea of celebrating my seventieth birthday by demonstrations of friendship and goodwill towards me. I earnestly request that all such

celebrations and greetings will be cancelled. This is too serious a time for all of us for indulgence in festivities, and my time is too much occupied with work to receive or answer greetings sent to me personally. Those who on my birthday will attend to our wounded soldiers and to the dependents of our soldiers, those who renew in their hearts the vow to stick out the fight until we win, and those who buy War Loan scrip, will make me the most acceptable birthday gift."

This appeal issued by the overworked man was unavailing. All German officialdom bore down on Kreuznach. Delegations came from all parts of the country. But it was not only in Kreuznach that Hindenburg's birthday was celebrated; there were festive demonstrations in every town and village despite the general distress prevailing throughout the country. Most of the houses were flag-bedecked. The schoolchildren got a holiday. Divine service was held throughout the land to invoke God's blessing on the man on whose shoulders lay the responsibility for the future welfare of the Fatherland.

The Kaiser also personally congratulated Hindenburg, and presented him with his bust in marble. After parting with the Kaiser Hindenburg proceeded to his headquarters. The streets which he traversed were strewn with flowers, and the schoolchildren of Kreuznach and the surrounding districts lined up on both sides of the road along which he passed. The officers of the Supreme Command, headed by Ludendorff, who welcomed him with a cordial greeting, were drawn up outside headquarters to receive him. Hindenburg thanked them all in a few simple words for the great assistance which they had all constantly rendered to him. Referring to Ludendorff, he once more emphasised the pre-eminence of the service which he had given.

It was truly a strenuous day. The Field-Marshal could

not escape from the ovations. He conversed for a long time with the wounded men and the war veterans. He spoke kindly to those who had brought him greetings from all parts of the country. They all promised that they would stand by him loyally, and that they would never give in until they were victorious.

"I want you to do even more than that for me," said Hindenburg in his reply. "I want you to fight against the minority in our country who are behaving in an unmanly fashion and who are not doing their share of the nation's work."

At a banquet in the evening, at which the Imperial Chancellor and the Cabinet Ministers were among the guests, the Kaiser greeted Hindenburg as the hero of the German people.

The enemy also celebrated Hindenburg's birthday, but in a different fashion. Towards evening it was reported that a squadron of enemy 'planes were approaching Kreuznach with the intention of bombing it. The German anti-aircraft guns luckily drove off the would-be attackers. There was a general feeling of tense excitement. Hindenburg, however, refused to believe that the enemy had any definite hostile intent, and he regarded the whole affair as the outcome of the general tension. Referring to the incident in his memoirs, he says: "Towards the end of the day there was a minor hostile interlude. A rumour had reached us from a source which I never succeeded in probing, of the probability of a big aerial attack on our chief headquarters on this day. It is possible that one or two enemy 'planes were, as frequently occurred, making their way from the Saar to the Rhine or back along the Nahe. It is quite understandable that at a time when people's imaginations are more excited than usual, especially at night time when there is a full moon, both their ears and eyes should register more than what they actually

heard and saw. Well, to put it briefly, towards midnight our anti-aircraft guns kept up a heavy continuous fire. Thanks to the rapid rate of firing they had luckily expended all their ammunition quickly, and I could not be disturbed any further. When I called on the Kaiser the following morning he showed me a big dish full of splinters of German shells which had been gathered up in the garden behind his headquarters. So apparently we had been exposed to a certain amount of risk. Some of the people of Kreuznach had been under the impression that the nocturnal firing was just a series of military salvoes in honour of my birthday."

The number of presents was immense. Gigantic mailbags laden with parcels arrived at Hindenburg's headquarters. All the rooms were packed with bouquets of flowers. The leading statesmen of the Allied Powers and all the German princes sent greetings to the Field-Marshal in their own handwriting, and those towns which had not already enrolled him as an honorary citizen, now conferred that distinction on him. And again the universities hastened to confer diplomas on him. The famous old university of Gottingen placed Hindenburg's bust alongside Bismarck's on that day. His native city, Hanover, presented him with Lenback's famous picture of the elder Moltke. He received from the General Staff a magnificent album with the photographs of all the officers at headquarters. Solingen, the famous old town of munition factories, presented him with an artistically wrought sword of honour, on the blade of which an epigram was inscribed.

Hindenburg was unable to reply individually to all those who sent him birthday greetings and presents, and so he issued the following announcement: "In the innumerable letters which I have received from all my friends and well-wishers I see a unanimous expression of confidence that, as in the past, I shall in the future devote



INSPECTING ARMY MANUFACTURES IN SHIMAZU



HINDENBURG REVIEWS THE TROOPING OF THE COLOURS

all my thoughts and deeds to the faithful service of my imperial and royal master. And in consequence of this unanimous confidence I think I am justified in making one request. We have withstood the overwhelming onslaught of our enemies with the assistance of God, with our German strength, simply because we all pulled together, because every one of us cheerfully performed the task allotted to him. Well, let us pull together until the victorious finish. Give thanks to God on the battlefields ! Give no thought to what will happen after the war. That will merely cause unrest among our ranks, and will strengthen the hopes of our enemies. Be confident in your trust that Germany will emerge from the fray with her position consolidated in a manner that can never be challenged in the future ; be confident that the German oak will spread its branches freely in the fresh air and sunshine. Brace your muscles—keep your nerve—look straight ahead of you ! The goal is right in front of you—a Germany honoured, free and great ! God will be with us to the end ! ”

“ Grit your teeth ! ” ran his reply to the greeting sent to him by the Eberfeld Soldiers’ League. “ Not another word about peace until the fight is over and victory is ours. This must be the password of the whole German people.”

When the magnificent response to the Seventh War Loan was announced, Hindenburg wrote to the secretary of the Public Treasury : “ I have indeed received yet another delightful birthday surprise in the news of the response to the Seventh War Loan. This response once more points out to our enemies that Germany cannot be crushed economically, and is a proof to me that the German people look forward with confidence to victory.”

When the Kaiser conferred on the Field-Marshal the iron cross with golden rays on the occasion of the great offensive in the west, numerous messages of congratulation

arrived again at his headquarters, among them one from the Chancellor of the Reich. "We have undertaken this great offensive in full confidence in the stamina of our magnificent troops," said Hindenburg, in acknowledging his greeting. "The army will not desist until, with God's help, it has won the sweeping victory which our country needs for a future based on a peace firmly established by Germany."

Towards the end of March, 1918, the German troops made a victorious advance in the west. The spirits of the civilian population in Germany revived anew in consequence. "Germany's future is assured when the will to win is as strong among our people at home as among our troops," wrote Hindenburg to the Bremen Senate.

"Our Eastern province will be so firmly entrenched when peace comes that never again will an enemy's foot tread our plains," ran an extract from Hindenburg's reply to a message of greeting from the town of Dantzig.

But alas! Dantzig's proud hopes for the future were doomed to disappointment. Only a year later the German Reich was divided in two by the Polish corridor, and East Prussia was sundered from the Fatherland.

But just at that time it seemed almost likely that the offensive which opened so auspiciously would eventually turn the scales of fate in Germany's favour. There was a widespread feeling of confidence abroad. Typical of the prevalent optimism was a message of congratulation from the Essen Miners' Union, in which the leaders of the German iron and steel industries expressed their sanguine hopes of a decisive victory. "The hardships and ordeals of the war are not yet at an end," runs an excerpt from their message. "But now they will be faced and overcome with more courage when we feel confident that, if it is our determination that such should be the case, a bright and peaceful future, instead of humiliation and forced labour,

awaits our children, and that from the German standpoint, the history of the world has developed a new orientation—that Germany will be free from the eternal struggle for existence which she has had to endure owing to her historical development and her geographical position. And for all this we thank Your Excellency with all our hearts.

“The events of recent months have proved that that victory cannot be snatched from us, which is essential for Germany’s future political and economic development,” said Hindenburg in reply. “It will be a victory all the more sweeping the more the homeland remains staunch in its support of the army, and the more it is prepared to endure the privations, both great and small, of a crisis which we can confidently hope will soon be over, with a view to securing a brighter future for ourselves and for posterity.”

It is with feelings of deepest sorrow that a German peruses once more these words full of hope, to-day, sixteen years after the Treaty of Versailles, which mutilated Germany, forced her to accept sole responsibility for the outbreak of the World War, imposed on her an intolerable burden in the form of reparations payments, and was the direct cause of inflation and of the present world-wide crisis, which has brought all the nations to the verge of ruin. And the feeling of sorrow is all the more poignant when it is recollected that these hopeful words were written such a short time before the dreadful collapse that awaited Germany. Even the most convinced pacifists, even those who thought that a draw would have been the best finish to the war in the interests of the human race as a whole, must admit that Germany was treated with the greatest injustice by the Treaty of Versailles. And to-day it is recognised in influential circles among our former enemies that only a mutual understanding, based on reason, can

restore true peace and prosperity to the whole world. Let us hope that while there is yet time this desire for a mutual understanding may prevail both in Germany and in the other nations. A little later it will be too late.

CHAPTER VI

HINDENBURG TAKES OVER THE WESTERN FRONT

IN the last chapter I had somewhat forestalled events. I must now go back to the period when Hindenburg superseded General Falkenhayn as Chief of the General Staff.

On August 28th, 1916, the following order from the Kaiser reached Brest-Litovsk : "Hindenburg and Ludendorff will set out for Army Headquarters with all possible speed." Simultaneously Hindenburg received a note from the Chief of the War Council which contained the ominous words : "The position is serious."

In his memoirs, Hindenburg tells us how he reacted to this dramatic crisis in his life : "I laid down the receiver, and thought of Verdun and Italy, of Brusilov and the Eastern Austrian Front, and of the message : 'Roumania has declared war on us.' It was a moment that demanded strong nerves."

General Falkenhayn proved himself no longer fit to cope with the demands which the increasingly menacing condition of affairs made upon the Supreme Command. For a long time the Imperial Chancellor, von Bethmann-Hollweg, had realised that Falkenhayn was unequal to his task, and had urged a change in the military command. In his view Hindenburg and Ludendorff were the only possible generals to fill the posts of Chief of General Staff and Quartermaster-General respectively. But the Imperial Chancellor had to make very urgent representations again

and again to the Kaiser before the latter could be prevailed upon to recall Falkenhayn, with whom he was on particularly friendly terms. It was only at the last moment when it seemed that the war was already lost, and when there were many ominous indications that the Central Powers were on the verge of a complete military collapse, that the Kaiser gave way to the reiterated appeals of Bethmann-Hollweg, and sent for Hindenburg. At that moment, in the view of many competent judges, the war was already irretrievably lost, especially as the efficiency of the Austro-Hungarian army was by now completely shattered. Nevertheless, Hindenburg unhesitatingly took over supreme command, despite this apparently hopeless outlook. It required courage and great confidence in himself, when the prospect was so utterly desperate, to undertake the responsibility of trying to remedy the chaotic condition of the military position of the Central Powers which had been the result of ill-conceived military measures.

The installation of Hindenburg and Ludendorff at Supreme Headquarters had extraordinary repercussions forthwith. Owing to the great reputation which those two men had among the army as well as among the German people, the confidence of people in the efficiency of the Supreme Army Command, which had considerably deteriorated within recent months, was immediately revived. The army hoped that at length there would be an end of the appalling system of trench-warfare. For a long time both the equipment and the food of the troops had been utterly inadequate. The commissariat conditions were appalling. But everyone now looked forward to a more definite and successful method of conducting the campaign. There were considerable numbers of people who would have preferred just then to see Hindenburg and Ludendorff taking charge of the entire administration of the country,

in order to put an end to the eternal squabblings between the politicians and Army Headquarters. Hindenburg's appointment had also a very favourable effect on the spirits of the civilian population. Bethmann-Hollweg had actually calculated that the transference of the two most popular generals in the German army to the Western Front would revive the hopes of the people, and this was one of the reasons why he so persistently urged the Kaiser to dispense with Falkenhayn. He had found it an extremely difficult task to induce the Kaiser to take this step.

The Kaiser was only too well aware that both Hindenburg and Ludendorff were strong-willed and extremely energetic generals. During the course of the heated disputes which Hindenburg and Ludendorff had with Falkenhayn, the Kaiser always sided with the latter. Indeed, the Kaiser used to feel personally aggrieved as a result of Hindenburg's downright criticism of Falkenhayn's strategy and tactics. But eventually even the Kaiser saw that he had to give way to the universal demand that a change should be made at Supreme Army Headquarters.

Hardly had Hindenburg and Ludendorff taken hold of the reins, when the insensate and sanguinary Verdun enterprise was stopped. Unfortunately, however, the triangle which had been wedged deep into the enemy lines at this sector was not withdrawn. The German positions along the line were reinforced, so that the English and French ceased their offensives which had now proved ineffective. The Austrian Front was also reinforced with German troops. Simultaneously the new campaign against Roumania started. The burden of work with which Hindenburg had to cope was colossal, but he found that Ludendorff's untiring energy was of enormous help to him. Ludendorff, of course, accepted joint responsibility for all

measures adopted by Hindenburg, but the final decision on measures was always made by Hindenburg.

Practically at the first attack, despite the difficult nature of the country which seemed to offer tremendous difficulties, Roumania was crushed. The army, consisting of German, Turkish and Bulgarian troops which advanced against the Dobruja, annihilated the Fourth Roumanian Army at Tutrakan, and reached Cernavoda-Constantza railway line at the end of October. At Hermannstadt Falkenhayn inflicted a decisive defeat on the First Roumanian Army, and a few days later the Second Roumanian Army met a similar fate at his hands, while the Austrians under Lieutenant-General Arz hurled the enemy back through the Carpathian passes. In close co-operation with Mackensen's army which forced the passage through the Danube, the Ninth Army under Falkenhayn broke through triumphantly to Targu Jiu, and cleared all the Roumanian forces out of Wallachia. Bucharest fell on September 6th. The Russian attack on the Carpathians was also beaten off, and the German-Austrian line remained invincible. These successes further strengthened people's faith in the men at the head of the Supreme Command.

There were reverses also, of course. Towards the end of October the French delivered a great offensive at Verdun, and drove a deep wedge into the German lines. The territory which had been acquired at the cost of terrible bloodshed after many months of fighting, was lost in a single day. The losses of the German troops were very heavy. In his memoirs Hindenburg contended that it would have been better if he had not only stopped the offensive at Verdun, but had even voluntarily relinquished all the territory that had been taken and had moved back the German Front.

Difficult as it was for Hindenburg when we take into account how congenial to his temperament offensive tactics were, he had for the present both in the east and in

the west to confine himself to a system of defence, and permit the trench warfare which he loathed so much, to continue. To one with his talent for strategy, this method of warfare was exasperating. In the warfare of materials, as he says in his memoirs, a general has no chance of bringing into play, to any great extent, his flair for strategy and tactics. In the trenches confronting him were enormous quantities of shells and the most up-to-date appliances of mechanised warfare. And it was this material warfare that was wearing out Germany's endurance in the field. The raw material, the war machinery and the manhood of practically the whole world were arrayed in battle against the Central Powers. Time was our worst enemy. As days rolled on, the advantage must inevitably lie more and more with those who possessed the most ample supplies of war material. The drum-fire going on for weeks on end from hundreds of thousands of guns of every calibre was crushing Germany's military strength more and more every day.

Hindenburg decided that the only way to counter this menace was to minimise the devastating effects of the warfare of material. And this, he saw, could only be effected by inaugurating a mobile defence. It was necessary to apply a hitherto untried system of defensive tactics. The enemy would be decoyed into penetrating into the elaborate system of trenches of the German defence. It did not matter if the enemy overran one, or two, or three lines of trenches—it did not matter if trenches which had been won by arduous fighting were given up. The main thing was to hurl back the enemy again in a counter-offensive. This was tantamount to reverting on a small scale to the warfare of movement. Furthermore, the artillery fire of the enemy lost much of its effectiveness by the necessity of constantly shifting its position. And then a break-through would be impossible with the German lines working on

such an elastic system. This novel method of defensive tactics imposed a very severe strain on the officers as well as on the men individually, as they had to fight now more upon their own initiative than is the case in the warfare of positions. The battalions and companies fought in small groups, with big gaps between them. Every shell-hole was used as a sort of little temporary fortress, which could be held by a few men equipped with hand-grenades and machine-guns.

As may be presumed, this new system of defensive tactics did not invariably prove successful at the start. There were inevitable blunders and misinterpretations of orders hurriedly issued. The opposition of various commanding officers had to be overcome, and it was a Herculean task to make a success of this system of defensive tactics. And it was a system that very frequently failed to work. But on many occasions it proved a striking success, and very soon the troops recognised its great efficacy, and thoroughly enjoyed taking part in working it.

The introduction of this hitherto untried method of defence was a great and a bold enterprise, and its results justified Hindenburg in adopting it.

In the Battle of Arras in April, 1917, this system of defensive tactics was tried, but on this occasion it proved a failure, and during the course of the fight it led to a very critical situation. Various subordinate generals had not as yet full confidence in this novel method, and others made very serious blunders, with the result that terrific chaos ensued. Luckily the English did not know how to follow up their initial success thoroughly. The German front line was soon firmly consolidated again, and the danger was averted. But the new method was tried with brilliant success in the Aisne-Champagne engagement, in which Neville, who had superseded Joffre on December 12th, 1916, as Commander-in-Chief, hurled his troops

against the German positions, in the hope of crushing the enemy at last with one desperate thrust. The French offensive was directed against the Aisne sector between Soissons and Rheims, and against Chemin des Dames, between Bailly and Craonne. As the Germans had acquired adequate information in advance as to the zone and time of the offensive, it spent itself against the carefully organised defence system of the Seventh and Eighth Army and fizzled out. The French reserve army, too, which had been in readiness for the purpose of rolling up the German front was sacrificed in vain. A series of mutinies broke out among the French troops as a result of this defeat, and Neville was recalled and superseded by Petain.

This success was primarily due to the deviation from the dogged clinging to front-line trenches, and to the holding of advance posts in an elastic manner by means of small bodies of soldiers and machine-gun nests. It was a system that caused the enemy offensive to dash itself, so to speak, against empty space, while his massed shock troops perished under the devastating fire of the second German Line. But just as the English had been unaware of the opportunity which they let slip past at Arras, so here, too, our Supreme Command did not know on this occasion how weak the enemy's position was, and failed to utilise their advantage to its utmost by delivering a smashing German counter-attack. The unwarranted hopes that were based on the success of the submarine campaign were responsible for the adherence to the principle of the elastic system of defence and to the Fabian policy adopted by the Supreme Command.

As there seemed no prospect of a decisive victory either in the east or in the west, a majority of the deputies in the Reichstag, led by Erzberger, advocated an effort to come to an agreement with the enemy with all possible speed. The advocates of this policy met their Waterloo in the

notorious July Revolution. Even after the retirement of Bethmann-Hollweg this antipathy between the Reichstag, which strove for a peace based on mutual agreement, and the Supreme Command, which thought of nothing but ultimate victory, continued.

Neither the Germans nor the enemy succeeded in changing the condition of stalemate into which the war had developed. Neither saw any prospect of ultimate victory. Nevertheless, the repelling of those formidable offensives launched by the enemy, especially when we take into consideration the exhausted condition of the German troops, was a tremendous strategic performance. If after he had introduced an elastic system of mobile defensive tactics, Hindenburg had not taken steps to see that the supply of war materials for the army—a matter which had been seriously neglected under Falkenhayn's tenure of office—should be improved, it is extremely probable that we would not have been able to keep the enemy at bay.

When Falkenhayn was in charge there was frequently a shortage of ammunition, and there was particularly a very definite failure to supply sufficient machine-guns, mine-throwers and artillery, whereas the enemy had a superabundance of modern war material. Again and again the German batteries along whole sectors of the front were silenced through shortage of shells. Hindenburg and Ludendorff were dismayed to discover this shortage of all kinds of war materials on their first visit to the Western Front in September, 1916. Especially there were not enough war planes to repel the English airmen who, with a daily increasing recklessness, used to descend quite close to the ground and enfilade the trenches with a raking fire. Hindenburg and Ludendorff made a special complaint about their plight owing to the inadequacy of the commissariat and munition supplies. They both kept hammer-

ing constantly at the Berlin authorities to remedy this shortage of war material and food for the soldiers, and to speed up deliveries.

Hindenburg very soon came to the conclusion that the effort to hold all the territory that had been conquered along the entire front merely entailed a futile sacrifice of human life without any compensatory strategical advantage. Consequently he considerably shortened the length of the Western Front by voluntarily falling back on the carefully built Siegfried position. In this way he was able to liberate large masses of troops who were urgently needed for his imminent great defensive campaign. By this bold procedure he proved himself a far-seeing strategist. He decided that he would not hold on for dear life to every foot of ground, and never hesitated to yield up of his own accord great stretches of the front when the general interests made such a step advisable.

Various experts on military matters have contended that under no circumstances should Hindenburg have shortened his line of defence in 1917, and that he should have devoted all his energies to a resumption of the warfare of movement. This was the only way, they contended, by which he could bring into effective play his strategic ability, and win a decisive victory in the west on the lines of his great victories on the Russian Front. The view was constantly expressed, both by officers and men, that if he could force the French to fight in the open, they would be annihilated. Everywhere along the front the soldiers yearned for an escape from the stagnation of the futile trench warfare and from the wearing drum-fire that was shattering their nerves.

Hindenburg, however, decided that neither in the west nor in the east had the psychological moment arrived for fighting in the open. As I have already mentioned, the phenomenal initial success of the submarine campaign contributed largely towards inducing the Supreme

Command to adopt a waiting policy. It is probable that the retreat to the Siegfried positions would have afforded a favourable opportunity for adopting mobile warfare, but the enemy was very cautious in his method of following up the retreating Germans, and the withdrawal from an entrenched position on the Western Front was a risky procedure. It is unlikely, furthermore, that the Kaiser's approval of such tactics would have been secured. All the time, however, both Hindenburg and Ludendorff were fully convinced that, if there was to be a decisive finish to the war at all, it would have to be made in an open battle on the Western Front. The only question that pre-occupied them was that of a suitable opportunity for their decisive battle. One factor they agreed was essentially vital for the success of such an encounter. Russia must first be put out of action! And so they watched with great interest the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, which was bound to finish the war on the Eastern Front.

Again and again as the months wore on, Hindenburg and Ludendorff renewed their warning to the Minister of War, the Chancellor of the Reich and various Cabinet Ministers to enlist all the energy of the civilian population in order to speed up the supply of ammunition. They were fully convinced that the "Home Front" did not realise its responsibilities fully, and they urged the institution of a more rigorous control of the nation's available labour. Sharp interchanges took place between the civilians and military departments, and between the Government and the Supreme Command. In a letter to Bethmann-Hollweg, Ludendorff demanded that all the country's available resources should be exclusively devoted to the service of the army, and that a central bureau should be established which should control all manufacturing and repairing plants in the interest of the common weal. Bethmann-Hollweg declined to entertain his proposal on



HINDENBURG AND GENERAL FRITZSCH DURING ARMY MANEUVERS



WITH DR. HITLER, THE BAVARIAN FLEMMER, AND HERR GROENER,
THE MINISTER OF WAR, WATCHING ARMY MANOEUVRES

the very justifiable ground that the establishment of such a bureau would, in the beginning, cause a complete disorganisation for many months of the output of all kinds of products that were indispensable for the civilian population.

The Hindenburg programme, which was sanctioned in the autumn of 1916 by the Reichstag, imposed very heavy demands upon the German masses, but even so, it proved in the long run not to be sufficiently far-reaching. The great defensive battles in 1917 involved a toll of human life and an expenditure of war material which far surpassed all previous calculations, and the problem of filling up the yawning gaps in the regiments and of feeding the guns became far more acute from month to month.

An intensifying of the sharp recriminations between the civil and military authorities became more pronounced daily. Ludendorff demanded that the Supreme Command should have a controlling influence in all matters connected with civilian administration—that it should have the right to decide not merely an issue bearing on military matters, but on all political and economic problems of the nation. For a while Bethmann-Hollweg managed to make a stand against this encroachment of the military authorities upon the domain of the civilian powers. Eventually, however, Ludendorff manœuvred the overthrow of the Chancellor of the Reich, whom he deemed “too indolent,” and succeeded in enlisting all the resources of the country in the service of the Supreme Command.

In a memoir to Michaelis, Bethmann-Hollweg's successor, Hindenburg advised him as to the line of conduct he should adopt as Chancellor of the Reich. He gave him a detailed list of all his predecessor's mistakes and shortcomings. He expressed his regret at Bethmann-Hollweg's belated and inadequate measures with regard to food supplies, the speeding up of production, the organisation of transport and of the coal supplies. Above all things, he

found fault with the failure of Bethmann-Hollweg to mobilise efficiently the energy of the civilian population.

Hindenburg's memoir concluded thus: "To sum up, all these circumstances had convinced me that, despite our successes in the field, we were being helplessly swept into the vortex of destruction, and therefore I felt that it was my duty to denounce Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg's remissness to His Majesty. I hesitated for a long time before taking this step, and it was only after considerable heart-searching that I could bring myself to adopt such proceedings against any man, which were strictly outside the range of my own duties."

Hindenburg demanded from the new Chancellor the most thorough co-operation between the Supreme Command and the Government. He especially insisted upon steps being taken to censor the Press, upon the inauguration of an intensive system of propaganda among the people, upon the placing of all war industries on a satisfactory footing, upon the mobilisation of the resources of national labour, and upon the combing out from all factories of men who were fit to bear arms. He also demanded that steps should be taken to prevent strikes, to maintain coal output, and to secure food supplies both for the army and for the people.

Nobody will deny that the Supreme Command was justified in informing the Chancellor of the Reich of the needs of the army and in pressing for attention to those needs. It was both the right and the duty of the Supreme Command to insist upon everything that was essential in their view in order to guarantee the defence of the country. It was their right and their duty to censure anything that reacted adversely on the army and its efficiency as a fighting machine. But during the course of the war the tendency of the Supreme Command at Ludendorff's instigation to encroach on the domain of the civilian administration

became more and more pronounced from day to day, and was carried to an extravagant degree. Military departments interfered with the administration of Governmental departments to such an extent that the relations between the Government and Hindenburg's Quartermaster-General became exceedingly strained. Hindenburg did his best to throw oil on the troubled waters, in the hope of stopping the spate of violent mutual recriminations that flowed steadily between Ludendorff and the civilian authorities, but he frequently found that the gulf that separated them could not be bridged.

CHAPTER VII

HINDENBURG AND POLITICS

AS I have emphasised in the previous chapter, the Supreme Command was justified in its encroachment upon the domain of the civilian authorities in all matters bearing upon the supply of man power, war material and food for the army. The seriousness of the situation demanded the closest co-operation between the army and the Government. Frequently military and civilian problems overlapped one another in such a manner that the interference of the former with the latter was inevitable and essential. Ludendorff could only visualise the civilian authorities, the Government and the policy of the Chancellor of the Reich and of the Cabinet Ministers as so many obstacles in the way of the men at the front. He asserted that what was won by the soldiers was invariably lost or frustrated by the civilians. He looked upon every statesman as a personal enemy of his, who should be forthwith silenced to prevent him from thwarting the plans of the Supreme Command. If he had his way, he would have seized in his own hands the reins of both domestic and foreign politics.

When eventually Ludendorff succeeded in getting Bethmann-Hollweg shelved, instead of appointing an energetic and efficient man as Chancellor of the Reich, the authorities selected Michaelis—a man who was temperamentally unfitted for the arduous task assigned to him. Yet both Hindenburg and Ludendorff were extremely

astonished when Michaelis proved himself unable to cope with the difficulties of his office. His successor, too, the shrewd but very sensitive Count Hertling, a tired old man, was hardly the type of Chancellor to suit the requirements of the Supreme Command. Hertling merely allowed things to drift at first, with the result that Ludendorff became more and more powerful. But when eventually the reins of government slipped to the ground, the Supreme Command declined to pick them up. To do so would mean accepting the responsibility for the political fate of the nation. Instead of doing so, it confined itself to embittered criticism. There was a repetition of the same kind of exceedingly unpleasant and futile interchange of letters between the Government and the Supreme Command which had marked the end of the Bethmann-Hollweg administration. Bitter recriminations went on between the civilian and military authorities at a time when both should have co-operated earnestly for the welfare of the country. The whole tragedy of the position of Germany is embodied in the letters from Hindenburg to the Chancellor of the Reich demanding a more energetic speeding-up of output and insisting on the Government accommodating itself in every way to the views of the Supreme Command. The Reichstag wavered in a state of indecision between the views of the Supreme Command and those of their political leaders. On the question of the submarine campaign the views of Hindenburg and Ludendorff were backed by the Reichstag. The Centre Party turned the scale in the decision. According to the view of the Centre Party the submarine campaign was a matter for the Supreme Command, and consequently it was the duty of the Reichstag to accept their decision. The Reichstag majority failed to realise that the political aspect of the submarine campaign was of far greater significance than its value as a method of warfare.

With every partial success the centre of gravity of popularity always swung more and more towards the Supreme Command. Even among big sections of the population who had to suffer so dreadfully from food shortage, the "flabby" Reichstag and the civilian officials were very unpopular. An astute system of propaganda, mainly circulated by the "heavy industries," held forth visions of great accessions of territory both in the east and in the west, of heavy indemnities that would soon have to be paid by the enemy who would rapidly be overcome, and of Germany's unshakable prominence as a world power. And it was pointed out that this great goal could only be attained by an unflinching perseverance in carrying out the war-programme laid down by the Supreme Command.

Bethmann-Hollweg, who in the earlier years of the war always worked in the closest harmony with the Reichstag, now stood practically alone. He had to look on helplessly at the further encroachment from day to day of the Supreme Command on the domain of the civilian authorities. A victorious general is always more popular than a cautious and shrewd statesman of the stamp of Bethmann-Hollweg. The pessimism of Bethmann-Hollweg was regarded as blundering and dangerous, while the optimism of Hindenburg and Ludendorff was regarded as justifiable and right.

Apart from the fact that the war was making no headway either in the east or in the west, and that consequently it seemed impossible to bring about the decisive engagement which was indispensably essential for Germany, the position of our Allies became more and more menacing. The death of the aged Emperor Francis Joseph deprived the Austro-Hungarian monarchy of the historical link that kept it together. The last bond that united the Dual Monarchy was sundered. "A great part of the national conscience of that Empire of heterogeneous races sank for ever into

the grave along with its venerable grey-haired Emperor," wrote Hindenburg in his memoirs. "The difficulties which the young Emperor had to face were in their number and magnitude utterly different from those attendant on the accession of a new monarch in a country with a homogeneous population. The new ruler sought to substitute for the disintegration through the death of the Emperor Francis Joseph, of the ethical bond which kept the constituent elements of the Dual Monarchy together, measures of reform of a conciliatory nature. He believed that his political concessions would have a moral reaction even on those elements which were intent on the dismemberment of his Empire. His panacea failed utterly to heal the maladies of his disintegrating state. The separatist elements had already made their pact long previously with our mutual enemies, and were not in the slightest degree inclined to repudiate it voluntarily!"

Bearing in mind these insuperable difficulties, Bethmann-Hollweg very rightly aimed at a peace based on mutual understanding—a peace by which Germany would suffer no losses. Ludendorff, on the other hand, still stood out for territorial annexations. He was determined to hold on to all the territories that the German army had overrun—Belgium, the Flemish Coast, Courland, Lithuania, and even Poland. The boundaries of Germany were to be fixed in such a manner that in future they would be immune from hostile attack. And above all things he insisted on guarantees. In Ludendorff's view the German people were fighting merely in order to attain this great goal, and it was on account of it that they endured such terrible sacrifices. He felt that the more ambitious the aims of the war were, the more patiently would the people continue to put up with their privations, and the more ready would they be to face even greater ordeals. This incurable antipathy between the Supreme Command under

I adhered to the negotiation and the aims of Bethmann-Hollweg had all strong repercussions on Germany's foreign policy. The enemy powers saw the position much more clearly than the military circles of the Central Powers, who at times risked themselves to be blinded by their partial successes in the field and had hardly as yet calculated on the possibility of their losing the war. Consequently the peace offer of December 12th, 1916, which was based completely on the successes in the field so far achieved, contained no tangible peace proposals which depended upon the relative positions of the warring powers. It was decided in advance to prove abortive, especially as the proclamation of Poland as a Kingdom, which had been made previous to the peace feeling, had been declined to negotiate for a separate peace.

The peace which the peace offer of the Quadruple Alliance found in the Entente Press was, as might be expected, "favourable," wrote Ludendorff in his memoirs. It was very clear that it was hopeless to reckon on a permanent return to a peaceful understanding with the Entente. They had absolutely compromised themselves by their secret and secret pacts, which could only be broken up as a result of our utter defeat. On December 12th came the reply of the Entente, which completely dispelled any doubt that they were intent on our destruction. The objection that the tone of our peace offer had ruled out from the outset all chance of a favourable reply, is untenable. In accordance with all the circumstances of our position we had to approach our enemies in a tone of confidence. In the interests of our military position also, I stood out for such a tone. Our troops had performed wonders, and had we adopted a different attitude in making our peace offer, how would it react on them? It was essential that our peace offer should

not lower the *morale* of our troops—and it did not lower it. If the Entente had been genuinely anxious for a peace based on righteousness and conciliation, they could and should have met us at a conference table, and laid their demands before us. If the negotiations failed, as the result of an eventual demand by Germany for territorial annexations, the Entente would be in a position to inflame their respective nations with renewed zeal for battle as a result of our attitude. But under such circumstances we would have been unable to prevail upon the German people, who were already pining for peace, to resume the fray. And still less would we have been able to prevail upon our war-weary allies to accompany us again into the field. This simple line of reasoning is a convincing proof that we were anxious for a settlement based on justice and conciliation when we made our peace offer.”

The fact is, however, that the generals of the Entente were thoroughly aware that time was fighting for them, and against the Central Powers, that our allies were war-weary and that Germany would eventually be forced through hunger, shortage of war material and lack of reserves of man-power to submit unconditionally if our enemies kept up an unremitting pressure on them in the field. Consequently a peace offer could only have a chance of a sympathetic consideration if its terms had at the very outset ruled out plainly and clearly any idea of territorial annexation.

The Kaiser's peace offer had, furthermore, frustrated the possibilities attendant upon the note addressed by President Wilson on December 18th, 1916, to all the belligerent states, inasmuch as the Entente, after the German proposals, had no longer any faith in the willingness of the Central Powers to accept a peace which would debar them from territorial annexations. President Wilson, in his message, had requested “all the states at present at war to express

their views regarding the terms under which the war could be brought to an end."

The respective Governments of the Quadruple Alliance replied to President Wilson's note on December 26th, and suggested that representatives of the various belligerent states should meet in some neutral country. The Entente declined to accept President Wilson's invitation.

Bethmann-Hollweg was henceforth convinced that there was no possibility of a peace by agreement as long as Hindenburg and Ludendorff were in power.

Early in April 1918 the Kaiser arrived at Bad Homburg, accompanied by Count Czernin and General Arz, who had taken over Supreme Command of the Austro-Hungarian army from Conrad, who, in consequence of some sharp interchanges with the Emperor Karl, was transferred to the command of the Southern Tyrolese Front. The Imperial Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, as well as Hindenburg and Ludendorff, were also ordered to meet the Kaiser at Bad Homburg. While the two monarchs held a private council with the heads of their respective Governments, a conference was simultaneously held by the German and Austro-Hungarian generals, in the course of which General Arz stated that his forces would be unable to hold out until the following winter owing to the shortage of raw material and the abnormally heavy casualty list. However, it was decided to continue the fight with the greatest possible zest, as it was impossible to forecast what the position would be when winter came.

About noon on the same day a joint conference was held by the generals and the politicians. Before they sat down to discuss the situation, Bethmann-Hollweg asked Ludendorff whether he thought that the time had come to make fresh overtures for peace. Ludendorff replied that he thought it would be very inopportune to do so at the moment, as the Entente were on the eve of securing

enormous accessions to the fighting forces. During the course of the meeting Count Czernin proposed that, with a view to securing an early peace, Germany should declare that she was prepared to hand over Alsace-Lorraine to France, and that Austria-Hungary would fuse Galicia with Poland, and work hard for the assimilation of Poland with Germany.

Count Czernin's suggestion was absolutely turned down by Ludendorff. "Everything was vague with regard to the Polish scheme," runs an extract from Ludendorff's memoirs. "On the other hand the question of giving up Alsace-Lorraine was a very unequivocal one—a question which, in my judgment, could not be raised unless we were actually beaten. Every nation stands or falls with its honour, and all parties in the Reichstag have always agreed that Alsace-Lorraine is German territory, and that it is a point of honour with us to fight for the defence of this territory of ours to the very utmost. . . . The handing over of Alsace-Lorraine would be an open admission of weakness. The Entente would see nothing in such suggestions voluntarily made by us but a frank admission that we were beaten in the field, and they would take the cue to make their terms as harsh as possible."

Such intransigentism is understandable and pardonable in a soldier. But Bethmann-Hollweg thought that it would be advisable to negotiate for a peace by agreement at the sacrifice of Alsace-Lorraine, in order to avoid a much greater disaster. Bethmann-Hollweg took a statesman's view of the issue, for he was aware that the Emperor Karl had already offered to make a separate peace with the Entente. However, Bethmann-Hollweg was not a Bismarck who could force the acceptance of his point in view of opposition to that of the Supreme Command. He gave an evasive reply to Ludendorff's demand that he should state *seriatim* his views regarding the objects of the war, and

bitter interchanges ensued when he told Ludendorff caustically that he could not rekindle the war fervour of the people by telling them fairy stories about future annexations in Belgium and the Baltic.

Even at the present day it would be very difficult to say whether a peace offer on the lines suggested by Czernin would have led to any definite result, but in view of the anxious position of things, a responsible Government would have been justified in making overtures for peace in spite of the attitude of the Supreme Command on the issue.

In his conversation with the Kaiser, Hindenburg complained of the inadequate support which the Supreme Command received from the Chancellor of the Reich. And in a personal letter to the Chancellor, dated July 19th, 1917, he pointed out that Germany's enemies based all their hopes upon the collapse of the resistance of her civilian population. "A strengthening of our Home Front will very speedily convince our enemies of the uselessness of continuing the war until their own very existence is at stake," runs an extract from this letter. "On the other hand every complaint about frustrated hopes, every hint about exhaustion, every expression of yearning for an early peace, uttered by ourselves or our allies, and every allegation that we will be unable to face another winter campaign, will undoubtedly prolong the war."

Towards the end of the meeting there was such an inter-clash of widely divergent views, that Ludendorff tendered his resignation, and Hindenburg likewise asked to be relieved of his office. At this critical juncture the Crown Prince intervened, and held a conference with the leaders of the various parties of the Reichstag, the majority of whom were in favour of the immediate dismissal of Bethmann-Hollweg. When the Crown Prince announced their decision, the Kaiser, with the greatest reluctance, made up

his mind that the Chancellor who had served him so faithfully for so many years, must go. The spineless Michaelis was entrusted with the government of the country. Which is equivalent to saying that the Supreme Command—or rather, that Ludendorff had won a decided victory. He was now firmly entrenched in political power.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SUPREME COMMAND IN POSSESSION OF POLITICAL POWER

WHEN Hindenburg and Ludendorff asked the Kaiser to choose between them and Bethmann-Hollweg, it was, of course, a foregone conclusion what his decision would be. There was no alternative to his siding with the army chiefs. Had he done anything else, the majority of the German people would have risen in revolt. Hindenburg to them was synonymous with victory—Bethmann-Hollweg was synonymous with a degrading peace.

Were it not for the pressure brought to bear on him by his quarter-master general, Hindenburg would still have continued to pull along with Bethmann-Hollweg despite their numerous clashes, but Ludendorff's power at Supreme Command Headquarters had already attained such dimensions that nobody was at all surprised at his strenuous efforts to bring the Government itself under his control.

Hindenburg had neither a talent nor a liking for politics. He was temperamentally incapable of the petty intriguing which is essential for success in politics. He was a soldier—all his utterances were the candid, outspoken expression of the mentality of a soldier. The only ambition he had in life was to be a successful soldier. Not that he sought for glory or applause in his profession of arms. He regarded it as a vocation which entailed a rigorous sense of duty

towards his Fatherland--the duty of defending Germany's honour and liberty with his life, if necessary, and of fighting to secure for her her rightful place among the nations.

Ludendorff was temperamentally the exact antithesis of Hindenburg. Despite his extraordinary qualities as a soldier and an organiser, he was in many respects Hindenburg's evil genius. Unbridled ambition was the main trait of his character. He was not satisfied with his successes in the military domain, he wanted to become a paramount power in politics. He had visions of becoming dictator of Germany. As the war wore on, he became from day to day more and more aggressive--nay, even brutal in his demeanour. He radiated rudeness and unsociability. He was feared by all his soldiers and heartily loathed by numbers of them. The tone of his oral and written pronouncements was dictatorial and hectoring to the verge of downright insolence. He was scathingly sarcastic to most of the officers of his entourage who ventured to express an opinion of their own. Hindenburg had frequently to intervene between Ludendorff and his victims. But Ludendorff was not the type of man to be held in check even by his superior. Whenever the opportunity occurred he was only too ready to usurp Hindenburg's functions. He tried, so to speak, to push the venerable Field-Marshal into the background. Of course, in doing so, he did not dare to adopt the arrogant demeanour which he displayed towards everyone else. He always stood to attention in the presence of Hindenburg, always addressed him as "Sir!" and was invariably deferential and courteous in expressing his views to him. But Hindenburg was the only man to whom Ludendorff was, at any rate on the surface, respectful--nay, almost cringing in demeanour.

All the generals quaked with terror when they faced

Ludendorff. Whenever he bore down unexpectedly on any sector of any of the German battle-fronts, as he had a very nasty habit of doing, fear and consternation gripped officers and men alike. And woe to any high-placed officer in the General Staff who failed to carry out Ludendorff's instructions to the very letter. He was very lucky if he got off with being reduced in rank and sent to the hottest sector of the battle-front. Another little trick of Ludendorff's was to pay surprise visits to subordinate generals during the course of bitterly contested defensive engagements. Such visits were frequently the prelude to wholesale dismissals. He often interfered with disastrous results in the tactical schemes of subordinate generals, and on one occasion after a nocturnal visit he ordered several artillery positions to be scrapped, and dismissed the officers in charge right away.

The domineering attitude which it was possible to display with impunity in military affairs, must have been visualised by Ludendorff as infinitely more easy to assert in dealing with politicians and Government departments. He held the view that the whole administration of civilian life should be reorganised and dragooned in accordance with military concepts. This narrowness of vision on the part of Hindenburg's "assistant and master," was most disastrous in its reaction on Germany. Despite his great intellectual attainments, Ludendorff was in many ways an amateur. He resembled the Kaiser in some of his attitudes. To the very last he was appallingly ignorant of the real political and economic position of the Central Powers. He could see nothing or think of nothing but the victory that was luring him on, and that was ever evading him like a will-o'-the-wisp. To attain this victory he thought that he ought to be able to conjure up armies out of the earth. Any man who was not fighting at the front he considered as absolutely of no importance. He could not

understand how anybody would dare to question any order given to him. If he had his way he would imprison—or, better still, he would shoot out of hand—anybody who went on strike. He was eternally cursing the flabby members of the Berlin Government, who were too cowardly to lock up the Social Democratic deputies and Labour Leaders, or to put them up against the wall to face a firing squad. He used to say that if he were Chancellor of the Reich he would deal very drastically with those wretched Cabinet Ministers who cringed so abjectly to the editors of dirty little Radical provincial rags. He would show them no mercy; he would be ruthless in his attitude towards any of those wretches who had the effrontery to stand up against him.

Before the final crash of Germany's hopes, Ludendorff had developed a very serious form of megalomania. He became more and more nervous and more and more liable to violent gusts of anger. Hindenburg found himself repeatedly forced to reprimand him for those outbursts. And Ludendorff always listened to his superior officer with a contrite expression, and apologised abjectly for his exhibition of bad temper.

Hindenburg always declined to put his signature to Supreme Command letters to Government or Civil Service departments unless they were couched in moderate and polite phraseology. He frequently insisted on revised drafts being drawn up of Ludendorff's explosive missives, before signing them. But although he had to censure Ludendorff many times for his truculent attitude towards the civilian authorities, he had great confidence in his ability, and for this reason he often gave way to him on issues on which they held radically divergent views.

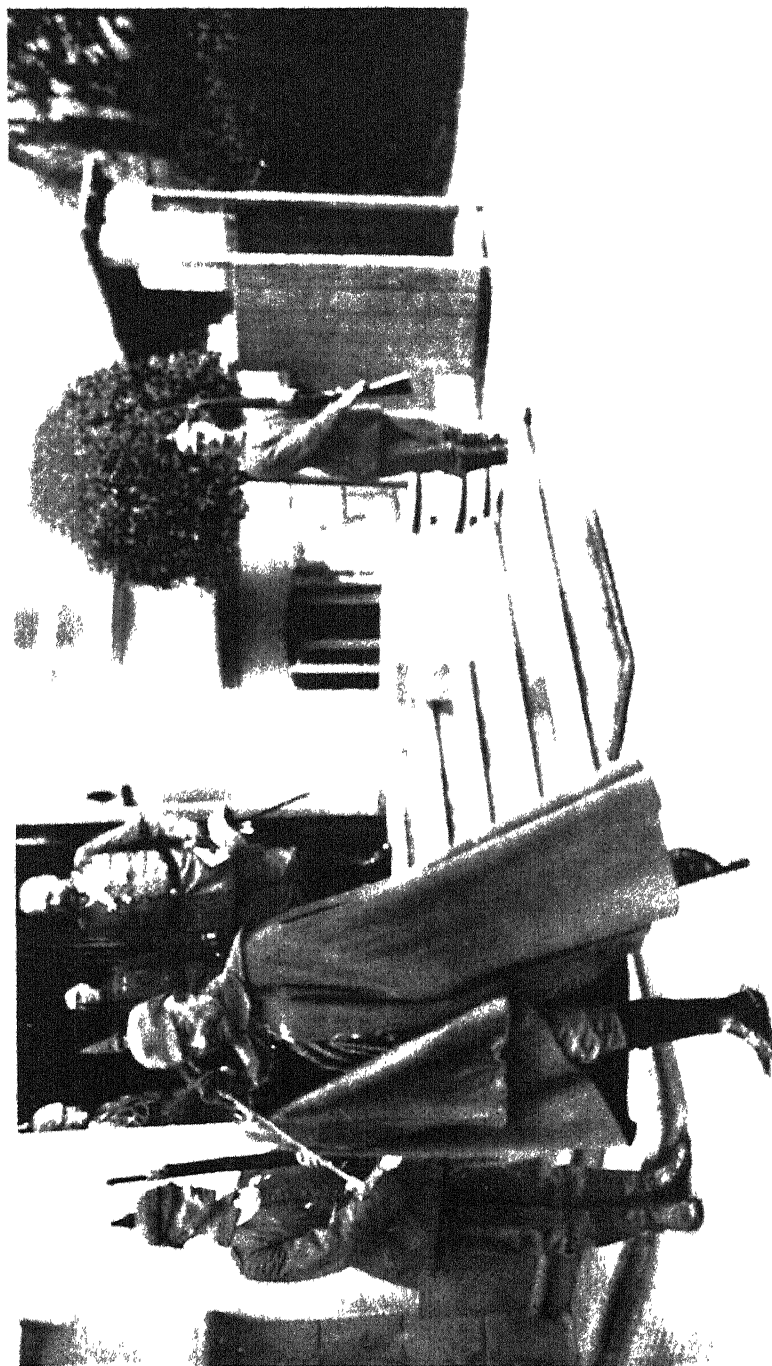
Taking all in all, the Reichstag and the Supreme Command pulled together more harmoniously than did the military authorities and the Government. On July

9th, 1917. Gustav Stresemann drew attention at a meeting of the Committee of Supplies of the Reichstag to the fact that the relations between the Government and the Supreme Command were rather strained. He stated that it was the desire of the Reichstag that the heads of the army would afford them the opportunity of an oral discussion with them on the military situation. Stresemann considered that it was of vital importance that deputies of all parties should discuss the general situation as soon as possible with Hindenburg and Ludendorff. This would, in his view, be the most definite means of clearing the air with regard to a number of sinister rumours that were being circulated with regard to the Supreme Command. Furthermore, Stresemann was anxious to find out to what extent the fatal statement issued by the Government, regarding Poland's independence, was to be attributed to Ludendorff's inspiration. Furthermore, he wanted some light thrown on the allegation that the Supreme Command had ordered the compulsory deportation of Belgian workmen, and had done so in defiance of the Belgian civil authorities. He felt that the Government were always responsible politically for the measures adopted by the Supreme Command and could under no circumstances shelve such responsibility. If the Chancellor of the Reich had not sufficient energy to assert his authority against that of the military leaders, there was only one obvious inference to be drawn from such a state of affairs. Stresemann was convinced that a candid discussion with representatives of all parties of the Reichstag could not fail to meet with the approval of Hindenburg and Ludendorff. And just as the Reichstag had the right to find out what was the precise position at the front, so the Supreme Command had the right to find out what was happening in the Reich during their absence.

This conference, which was arranged by Stresemann,



AT SUPREMI III ADOLPHUS IN 1917



THE KAISER DURING HIS VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES IN 1890
STANDING IN THE BATH

took place on the occasion of a visit paid by Hindenburg and Ludendorff to Berlin immediately after the resignation of Bethmann-Hollweg, and the peace resolution which was passed by the majority in the Reichstag on July 13th, 1917, at the instigation of Count Czernin. This fortuitous coincidence gave rise in Berlin to the erroneous impression that Hindenburg and Ludendorff had come to the capital specially for the purpose of taking part in the discussions regarding the peace resolution.

The conference with the deputies was quite an informal affair, and the position was discussed candidly. "We expressed our views about the military situation," Ludendorff states in his memoirs. "We said that conditions were serious, but that they were not desperate. We further decided that the only thing for us was simply to stick it out, as our enemies did not want peace—that our supplies of ammunition had improved, and our supplies of raw material at the moment were adequate. We confessed that we felt rather dubious with regard to the peace resolution. It did not meet with our approval, simply because it was bound to react adversely on the *morale* of our troops and upon the fighting spirit of the civilian population, and would be regarded alike by our enemies and our allies as an admission of weakness, and consequently it would have very unfavourable repercussions for us. . . . In conclusion we expressed the view that we would win if only the people would stand united in a solid phalanx behind the army. And the Reichstag must do its part to bring about this desirable consummation."

Dr. Helfferich, one of the Ministers, requested the deputies not to permit any information to be published for the time being regarding the peace resolution. In defiance of his request the *Vorwärts* published on the following morning a detailed account about it. "It struck me after that," stated Ludendorff in his memoirs, "that

any further discussion would be rather futile and purposeless."

The hopes which Stresemann had based on the discussion were not fulfilled, although Hindenburg and Ludendorff, at the request of the new Chancellor of the Reich, Dr. Michaelis, took part in further discussions about the peace resolution at the Ministry of the Interior.

"At the meeting we were astonished to learn that the necessity of the peace resolution was based on the view of the majority of the Reichstag, upon the attitude of the civilian population," says Ludendorff in his memoirs. "It was the only means, in their view, of stimulating the people to stick it out, should the peace they yearned for not materialise. It was a depressing picture of the spirit of the people. Indeed, it was considerably worse than I had imagined."

Even the realisation of this depressing state of affairs did not prevent the Supreme Command from still adhering to their demands for territorial annexations.

CHAPTER IX

THE PEACE OF BREST-LITOVSK

RUSSIA'S power to stage any more great offensives was broken, but she still kept a considerable portion of our army and those of our allies engaged on the Eastern Front, which was sorely needed in order to bring about a decisive engagement in the west. The various favourable opportunities of securing peace on the Eastern Front which had occurred during the first two years of the war, were allowed to pass to no purpose. Falkenhayn was not a man with broad vision and initiative in military operations. But this was not the sole reason for his dallying policy. It is well known now that his repeated refusals to accede to Hindenburg's urgent requests that he should send the requisite reinforcements for the purpose of rolling up the Russian Front from the South to the North, were not solely the result of his strategic calculations. Hindenburg had been the idol of the people since the battle of Tannenberg, and the ambitious Falkenhayn regarded him in consequence as his most dangerous rival. Although Falkenhayn, as Chief of the General Staff, was responsible for the operations in all the theatres of war, the people gave all the credit for the victories in the East to a general who was his subordinate. Everybody knew Hindenburg. Nobody spoke about Falkenhayn. Every day the Press demanded with more and more insistence that Hindenburg should be given Supreme Command of the army. In him, and in him alone, they based their hopes of victory. But for

just this very reason Falkenhayn was determined that he would not voluntarily hand over his job to the liberator of East Prussia. He had the Kaiser at his back, as I have already pointed out. And despite the fact that a mass of legendary fabrications have been woven about the antipathy between the Kaiser and Hindenburg, the relations between the monarch and the aged general had not been friendly for a considerable time, partly owing to the fact that they were temperamentally quite at variance with each other. The Kaiser was fully aware of the great military ability of both Hindenburg and Ludendorff, but for all that he hesitated at that fatal moment to yield to the universal demand, and to make a change in the Supreme Command. Just as in choosing his advisers in peace time, personal friendships were frequently deciding factors with the Kaiser even during the war.

In the year 1916 Verdun was sapping all our military energy, with the result that, as long as that crazy onslaught went on there was no hope of a decisive battle in the east. Added to this, as frequently was the case during the course of the World War, court intrigues had a great deal to do with the situation. Peace feelers were thrown out to Russia. The Kaiser, who was considerably influenced by his entourage, was led to believe that even without a decisive victory to speed up the issue, peace, based on a mutual arrangement with the Tsar's exhausted empire, was bound to come very soon. The Tsar had taken care that indications of his desire for peace should reach the Kaiser's ears. The Tsar's purpose in this move was to save the Russian Front from violent German onsets. When the Kaiser heard the rumours about the Tsar's desire for peace, he was very hopeful that negotiations would start very soon.

One of the unsolvable riddles of the World War is the fact that Hindenburg, when he was appointed to the Supreme Command, especially as by that time the rumour

about an imminent peace offer from Russia proved unfounded, did not immediately take steps to stage the big decisive engagement on the Eastern Front, for which he himself had so persistently appealed when Falkenhayn was at the head of affairs. It is quite true that the position was not nearly as favourable on the Eastern Front as it had been in the first two years of the war, but for all that, Russia could have been put out of action towards the end of the summer and in the autumn of 1916. After the position on the Western Front had been firmly entrenched, after the Verdun shambles had been stopped and all was once more relatively quiet on the Somme, but especially after the crushing of Roumania, a sledge-hammer blow could have been delivered against Russia, even at the cost of yielding up a considerable stretch of territory in the west. Austria was on the verge of collapse, and was already pondering the question of a separate peace. This was a menace that could only be averted by the destruction of the Russian army. And then there was the paramount consideration that a smashing victory in the west was out of the question until Germany could transfer all her forces to that theatre of war.

A regard for strict historical accuracy forces us to admit that it was a serious error on the part of the Supreme Command that they did not despatch all their available troops to the Eastern Front in order to bring Russia to her knees. Whether the great offensive which had been so urgently demanded by Hindenburg before he had been appointed Chief of the General Staff would, at this date, lead to a complete annihilation of the Russians, is open to question, inasmuch as the considerable extension of the battle-fronts which had taken place in the interval made a concentrated drive impossible. Still, there can be no doubt that a powerful offensive against Russia would, even at that late hour, have been productive of very

definitely important results. In view of the shortage of food in Germany, which was every day becoming more and more acute, it was urgently necessary to throw open the vast grain tracts of Russia. The immediate effect of such a step would be the elimination of the menace of famine which brooded over Germany and her allies. The opening of her Eastern frontiers would give a tremendous fillip to the waning *morale* of the civilian population. In 1916 Southern Russia was by no means so utterly devastated as it was two years later. It had still abundant harvests and granaries.

From day to day the Germans were listening anxiously for the first rumbling of the Russian Revolution. But it was not until March, 1917, that the Tsarist regime collapsed, and a republic was proclaimed with Kerensky at the helm. The hopes, however, that had been based on the overthrow of the Tsar, proved elusive. Russia still fought on the side of our enemies. The Entente did all that was possible to prevent Russia from making a separate peace with us. Money was spent lavishly on this purpose. Millions of pounds were poured into the coffers of the Russian Government, as well as into the pockets of Kerensky and his Ministers, who, for the sake of safety, deposited a considerable portion of their blood-money in foreign banks. They had a premonition that their tenure of power would be brief. Thirty leaders of the Russian Bolsheviks, with Lenin at their head, who were living in Switzerland, secured, at the request of the Supreme Command, a free pass to Russia from the German Government. And so it was that the representatives of the capitalistic system did not hesitate to sow with their own hands in the country of the enemy the seed of that Communism which they so much loathed—a seed which after the war was destined to germinate with a riotous vegetation, which proved a menace to the economic system of the whole world.

After the fall of the Tsarist regime Lenin could no longer endure the enforced inactivity of his exile in Switzerland. He saw that the time had arrived when he could carry out the economic schemes which he had been planning for decades. He felt that he was called to lead the proletariat to victory, and to inaugurate the World Revolution. "The Provisional Government will gladly welcome back from exile and from prison all those who have suffered for the welfare of their country," ran an extract from a manifesto issued from Petrograd. These were words truly calculated to inspire confidence, but Lenin knew that Kerensky and the other members of the new Russian Cabinet were "at heart the well-paid agents of France and England." He felt that Kerensky would never help the workers to attain power, and he knew before he ever set foot in Russia that he would not, and could not, become a member of Kerensky's Government. Still, once he was in Russia, he felt that that Government would serve him as a stepping-stone. And then, when the opportune moment came, he would seize the reins of power himself.

The route through the Entente territories was closed against Lenin. He saw little prospect of success by travelling incognito and with a false passport through Germany. He needed Ludendorff's consent for travelling through Germany, but he insisted that that consent should be open and above board, and that it should not be hampered by any secret clauses, which would inspire distrust among his followers. Eventually Lenin decided to send Fritz Platten, a member of the Chamber of Deputies, as an ambassador to the Kaiser, and likewise a member of the Communist Party. The Kaiser granted him permission to travel through Germany to Sweden. And so Lenin set out with his twenty-nine comrades. Before starting, however, he rallied them around him, told them of his plans, and said that it was the duty of every Bolshevik at that crisis "to

adopt every available means for returning to Russia." Lenin's comrades agreed with him on this score, but they did their best to dissuade him from taking the risk of travelling through enemy territory. They thought that the granting of the free pass was just a bit of trickery. But Lenin did not hesitate for a moment, and on April 8th, 1917, the thirty exiled Bolsheviks, with the consent of the German General Staff in Berne, purchased third-class tickets, and entering a train that was awaiting for them, proceeded via Stuttgart to Russia. In Stockholm, Lenin was received by Radek. Thence he proceeded to Finland, whence he travelled by sleigh to the Russian frontier. The thirty exiles were greeted with inquisitive but friendly glances by the outposts of the Russian army.

Lenin waited impatiently for the departure of the next train for Petrograd. He was secretly wondering what sort of a reception was awaiting himself and his comrades. It was quite possible, it occurred to him, that he might be thrown into prison. He could get no definite information from anybody. However, when he heard the rolling of drums as his train steamed into the railway station at Petrograd, all his doubts were at an end. The strains of the "Internationale" and a wild chorus of cheering greeted him. The Petrograd garrison sent representatives of all branches of the service to receive him. Lenin's name was on the lips of thousands. And so it was that the founder of the Russian Soviet regime entered Petrograd in triumph.

But although even then Bolshevism was already raising its menacing head, Kerensky was still in power. Further, millions of Russian soldiers were sacrificed for the sake of the gold that was being poured into the coffers of Kerensky's Government. Large numbers of reliable officers were sent by the Entente to reorganise the Russian army. The most important posts in the army were entrusted to them. The artillery, which was now the backbone of the Russian

front, was handed over to French and English officers, who immediately fired on the Russian infantry, whenever the latter tried either to fraternise with the Germans or to fall back. It was an everyday occurrence to see Russian soldiers crawling out of their trenches towards the German barbed wire entanglements to chat with the enemy about the imminent peace. But always on such occasions heavy artillery fire descended upon the fraternising Russians and Germans and put an end to their informal peace parleys.

Only once did Kerensky's Republican Government and the Entente actually succeed by their united efforts in rekindling a fitful gleam of the fire of battle in the Russian army. In June, 1917, they made a drive against the Germans at Smorgon and against the Austro-Hungarian lines in Galicia. The German front repelled the attack, but in Galicia there was a repetition of the previous year's debacle. The Austro-Hungarian troops offered only a very slender resistance, and were utterly routed, with the result that Galicia fell once more into the hands of the Russians. It was not until July 19th that a German counter-attack effected a break-through in the Russian lines and cleared the country completely of the enemy.

The German troops advanced as far as the Moldau, but had to pull up, as it was so difficult to bring up reserves. In accordance with their usual custom, the retreating Russians destroyed all the roads and railway lines. The remnant of the Roumanian army had taken its stand on the banks of the Moldau. Had the Germans pushed forward a little more vigorously they would either have annihilated them or driven them back to Russian territory, where they would not be able to secure a firm footing for a long time owing to the Russian Revolution which was about to crash over them. But owing to the lack of reserves

and the difficulty of bringing up food supplies the German generals thought it inadvisable to go further ahead with their military operations.

Once more the Supreme Command hesitated, and once more a favourable opportunity was allowed to slip by. They were satisfied with wearing down the Russian front with sectional "attrition" tactics. Hindenburg had not by any means abandoned the idea of speeding up the disintegration of the Russian army by a final offensive, but he did not think that it was an opportune time for it. At the moment the Western Front needed all the available military reserves of Germany, and consequently all that could be done in the east was to keep gnawing away slowly at the Russians. This was a fatal mistake on the part of the Supreme Command. Later events proved that it would have been better, even at the sacrifice of important sectors on the Western Front, to hurl all the troops that could possibly be spared against the Russians, who were certainly not in a position to put up an effective resistance, and to force them to sue for peace at the earliest possible date. Had that been done, the great offensive on the Western Front might have been started immediately, instead of waiting until March 21st, 1918, when the Americans were in France with a powerful army of young troops and abundance of war material. In the autumn of 1917, the superiority of the enemy in numbers and in war material was not yet so pronounced, and the German soldiers were not so war-weary and exhausted, so that the conditions essential for a decisive victory were infinitely more favourable than they were half a year later. Furthermore, the very fact that the results of the submarine campaign during the course of the year 1917 were disappointing, ought to have made it imperative to secure peace on our eastern frontiers, and then to start a great offensive on the west, especially as the steadily increasing

difficulty in maintaining food supplies and bringing up reserves made Germany's prospects worse and worse as the months rolled on.

On September 2nd, a second German drive, which was made this time across the Dvina, culminated in the capture of Riga. The Russians only offered a very slender resistance. There was great uneasiness in Petrograd, as it was feared that the offensive would not cease until the capital fell into German hands. As a matter of fact military experts contended that the German troops might easily have reached Petrograd a week later without any fighting worth talking of. The history of the world might have taken quite a new orientation. And as a result of such a victorious advance Kerensky would very probably have been inclined to make peace, despite the great influence which the Entente had upon him. Just then he still had the greater part of the front troops under his control, and it would still have been possible for him perhaps to crush the Bolshevik Revolution. But the Supreme Command would not entertain the idea of advancing on Petrograd, and were satisfied with occupying the islands of Osel, Moon and Dago in the Gulf of Riga, with a view to menacing Petrograd and bringing pressure to bear upon the Russian Government. The army and navy co-operated magnificently in the Gulf of Riga. But indeed the Russians offered only a very faint-hearted resistance, and the German casualties were very slight. But the hope that this German advance would cause Kerensky to sue for peace proved elusive. Its only effect, as the Supreme Command had foreseen, was that the Bolsheviks got control of Russia two months later, on November 6th.

Once more valuable time was lost. Instead of giving instructions for a bold drive for Petrograd, the Supreme Command sent strong German forces for an offensive against Italy. The eleventh battle of the Isonzo in August

and September proved that Austria-Hungary's powers of resistance had become considerably weakened. The Emperor Karl had sent out peace feelers to France through Prince Sixtus in the hope of securing a separate peace, to attain which he was quite prepared to drop his German allies. The Supreme Command consequently felt that at all costs the danger of Austria-Hungary dropping out of the fight must be averted. From what we know at the present day, it is questionable whether the danger of Austria-Hungary giving way was so imminent, but the Supreme Command thought otherwise at the time, and decided once more that the Russian issue would have to wait.

On October 24th General von Bülow undertook with eight German divisions of the Fourteenth Army acting in conjunction with the Krausz Austro-Hungarian army group a smashing offensive on the Fleitsch-Tolmino sector, and pushed ahead in a series of hammer-thrusts through Udine to the Tagliamento. Their onset was only brought to a halt when they reached the Piave, which had overflowed its banks. The Second and Third Italian Armies were intercepted, and 250,000 men were taken prisoners. Although Conrad's simultaneous attempt to take the new Italian army in the flank, proved abortive, the fighting power of the Italians was so shaken that Austria was once more able to hold the front without German assistance. Furthermore, it was not the aim of the Germans to attempt the overthrow of Italy. The ill-advised idea of dealing sectional thrusts with a view to shattering the enemy fronts was finding more favour daily with the Supreme Command. It was a variant of the "battering-ram" tactics which Hindenburg at an earlier stage of the war had so emphatically condemned. The system of driving wedges into the lines of the enemy never led to any conclusive results in his view. Yet in the interest

of strict historical truth, it must be admitted that Hindenburg was guilty himself of the very faults for which he had so often blamed Falkenhayn. The Chief of the General Staff on the North-Eastern Front, Major-General Hoffmann, who after the Battle of Tannenberg had been such a zealous assistant to Hindenburg and Ludendorff, now made exactly the same complaint about Hindenburg which Hindenburg had formerly made about Falkenhayn. In his memoirs of the World War General Hoffmann refers to that titanic struggle as the "war of lost opportunities."

Owing to the fact that during the first two years of the war no great smashing offensive was made against Russia, and that the third year was allowed to pass by in elusive hopes based on the Russian Revolution, eighty German divisions were engaged throughout the whole year of 1917 on the Eastern Front.

At length the Bolshevik Government asked for an armistice on November 26th, and on December 22nd peace negotiations were started in Hindenburg's former headquarters at Brest-Litovsk.

A month previous to this the Russian People's Commissars, Lenin and Trotsky, had broadcast a message from the Tsar's former palace at Tsarskoe-Selo to the "whole world," in which they called upon the "warring nations before their own people and before the whole world" to state whether they were ready to enter upon peace negotiations. "We propose to draw up a new contract publicly with all the nations on the basis of mutual understanding and co-operation," the broadcast message continued. On receipt of this radio message, the Central Powers decided to invite the Entente Powers to take part in the proposed general negotiations for peace, despite the fact that Herr von Kühlmann, the German Secretary of State, was sceptical about the wisdom of such a step, and did not believe that all-round negotiations were

feasible. He added, however, that, presuming that their enemies did agree to discuss terms with the Central Powers, neither side should raise the issue of territorial annexations at the conference table. On this point he was presently at loggerheads with the Supreme Command. In the view of the Supreme Command, owing to the success of German armies on the Eastern Front, the occupied Russian territories should be incorporated in the German Reich and, furthermore, a broad strip of Poland should be annexed in order to guarantee the protection of our frontiers.

Count Czernin, the representative of Austria-Hungary, issued an invitation to a discussion of peace terms by all the belligerent nations, in reply to the Russian radio message. His position was far easier and simpler than that of the German Secretary of State, inasmuch as Austria-Hungary was not looking for any territory from Russia. The Turks, and especially the Bulgarians, were very voluble in their protests regarding the issue of territorial annexations. The Bulgarians pointed out that Falkenhayn had guaranteed that in the event of victory they would get the Dobruja as well as certain sections of Serbian territory. Thanks, however, to the personal intervention of the Tsar Ferdinand, this difficulty was surmounted, and it was decided to hold the peace conference. As was to be expected, the Entente Powers gave a curt refusal to the invitation to attend. The German plenipotentiaries were Herr von Kühlmann, as head of the delegation, and General Hoffmann, as representative of the Supreme Command. Austria-Hungary sent Count Czernin, while the Russians deputed Joffe and Kamenev, who had been released from a prison in Siberia in which they had languished under the Tsarist regime, to act on their behalf.

Previous to the actual peace negotiations an Imperial conference was held on December 18th in Kreuznach, at

which Hindenburg and Ludendorff strongly advocated that the negotiations should be based on the fact that Germany had been victorious on the Eastern Front. Hertling and the Secretary of State, on the other hand, felt that the territorial annexations, which the contention of the Supreme Command postulated, could not be insisted upon, if the ultimate goal was an all-round peace. When it became pretty evident that von Kühlmann was anxious for a peace based on mutual agreement, there were heated interchanges between him and the representatives of the Supreme Command. The Supreme Command insisted that General Hoffmann should have an authoritative say in the negotiations. The Kaiser also approved of this demand, which was strongly advocated by both Hindenburg and Ludendorff. He pointed out that it was of paramount importance to arrange peace terms as quickly as possible in order to be able to deal a decisive blow in the west. It was only when everything had been settled in the east that the troops could be drafted to the west.

Hindenburg handed the Kaiser a memoir containing a detailed statement of the views of the Supreme Command with regard to the peace negotiations. In this document he emphasised at the outset the fact that by order of the Kaiser, himself and Ludendorff should have an authoritative voice at the conference table. Ludendorff was responsible for drafting this memoir, but Hindenburg altered some important clauses in it. It was a candid expression of the grave concern which the Supreme Command felt regarding the lack of vision of the members of the Government in neglecting to consider the question of safeguarding the eastern frontiers of Germany. It pointed out that the Supreme Command considered it absolutely essential for the future safety of Germany that she should acquire a strip of Polish territory.

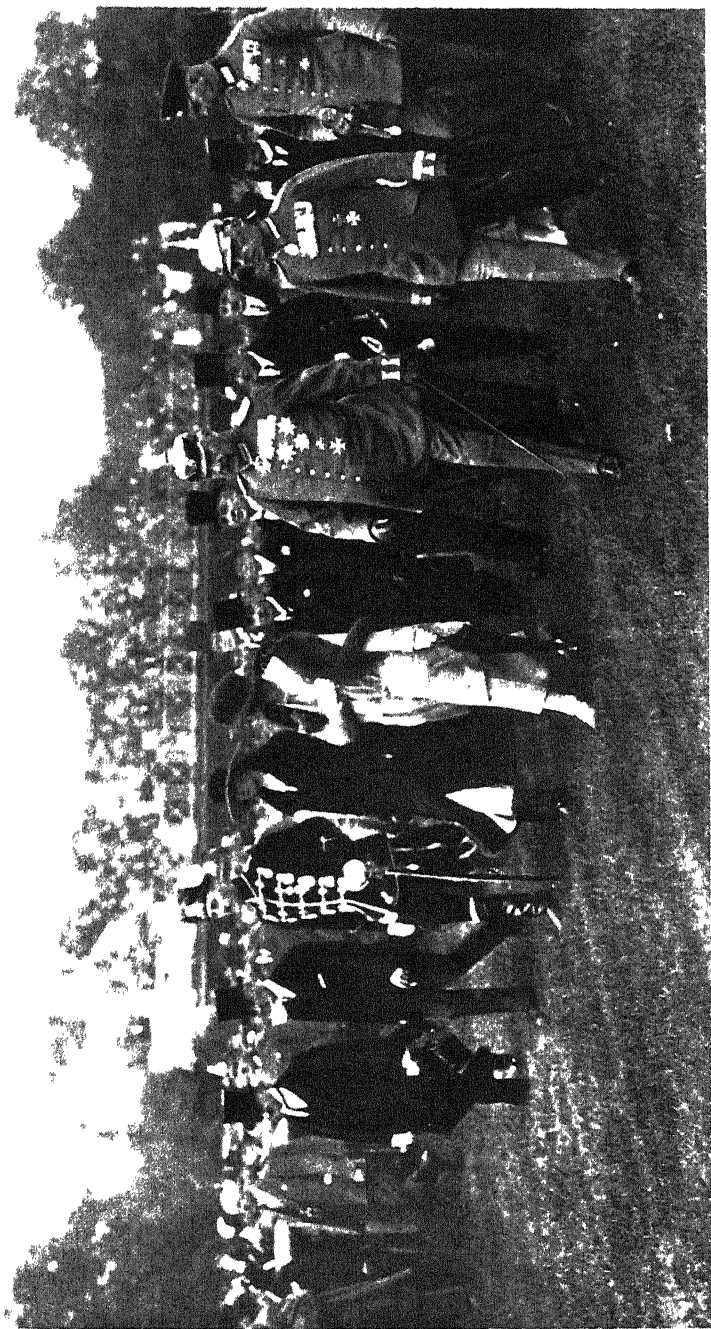
General Hoffmann, whose political vision was far keener

than Ludendorff's, was extremely dubious about the wisdom of annexing the strip in question, which was inhabited by nearly 2,000,000 Poles. He considered that its annexation by Germany would mean a drastic mutilation of the recently created State. Furthermore, he held that the incorporation of such a large number of Poles would merely be a menace to German interests, and asserted that if he had his way he would not incorporate a single Pole in the territory of the German Empire. A detailed statement of his views on this issue was made by General Hoffmann at a New Year's Day breakfast-party given by the Kaiser. He contended that it would be sufficient to annex a small strip of Polish territory with a view to ensuring that the railway junction at Thorn would not come within range of modern artillery, and he suggested that, for the same reason, a strip should be annexed on the frontiers of the coal-mining zone in Upper Silesia. For this purpose an area of a few square miles with 100,000 Polish inhabitants, at the very outside, would suffice. At the Kaiser's desire General Hoffmann drew a rough map of his suggested readjustments of the frontier, and passed it round the breakfast table.

On the occasion of the famous Imperial Council, which was held on the evening of January 2nd, 1918, in Bellevue Castle, the Kaiser laid General Hoffmann's map before the assembled generals and statesmen, saying : "Gentlemen, you will find outlined in this map the future frontiers between Prussia and Poland. As Supreme Head of the State and Commander-in-Chief of the Army I approve of these frontiers." The Kaiser added that his own personal view on the issue was corroborated "by the opinion of an able expert in such matters—to wit, General Hoffmann." Immediately Ludendorff sprang to his feet in a towering passion. He had completely lost his head. In a voice of thunder he demanded that the Kaiser should not take



THE KAISER TALKING WITH HINDENBURG



HINDENBURG ON HIS WAY TO DEDICATE THE MONUMENT TO THE GERMEN RIDERS KILLED IN THE
GREAT WAR

into consideration a report made by a general who was subordinate in rank to Hindenburg and Lunsell. He considered General Hoffmann's frontier scheme utterly inadequate.

Hindenburg told the Kaiser that he fully concurred with Ludendorff's views. "Very well," replied the Kaiser, rising from the table. "Please send me a written report of your views."

And so ended a very painful scene.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff drew up a new memoir, in which they expressed the gravest concern regarding the proposed alignment of the frontiers which the Kaiser had virtually accepted. Hindenburg was also opposed to the granting of independence to the Ukraine, Courland and Lithuania. In his view Germany's military position in the east was incompatible with the establishment of such an unsatisfactory frontier alignment. He added that from an economic point of view, too, he differed from the attitude of the Government regarding Germany's eastern boundaries. He denounced the preliminary steps taken by the Foreign Office regarding the peace negotiations as utterly inadequate. Hindenburg was especially emphatic in his condemnation of von Kuhlmann, and complained that, without previously weighing the views of the Supreme Command on the matter, he had obtained the Kaiser's approval of his proposed frontier scheme. It was regrettable, Hindenburg went on, that the Kaiser should accept General Hoffmann's view as final. Hoffmann had an utterly wrong conception of the Polish frontier question.

In conclusion, Hindenburg protested very emphatically against his own subordinate general being accepted as the Kaiser's adviser on such a vital question. Both himself and General Ludendorff had been greatly pained by the slight implied by such contempt for their views. "It is an indication that Your Majesty disregards our opinion

on a question bearing upon the very life of our German Fatherland," said Hindenburg.

He went on to point out that an unsatisfactory peace on the eastern frontier would have a very depressing effect on the *morale* of the army. Both himself and Ludendorff would be held responsible by the army for such a denouement. "After this handling of the frontier question in the east," said the Field-Marshal, "I cannot help feeling very dubious as to whether on the conclusion of peace we shall secure for Germany the fruits of victory which are compatible with our success in the field, and which are commensurate with the sacrifices we have endured," he continued. "A terrible sense of disillusionment would, I greatly fear, be the lot of our home-coming army and of our civilian population, who would be crushed by a staggering burden of taxation."

The memoir next referred to the impending great offensive on the Western Front which the Supreme Command had suggested to the Kaiser, and which had been sanctioned by him. "In order to attain our rightful position in the world, both in the political and economic domains, we must overthrow the Western Powers," Hindenburg went on. "And it was with this goal in sight that Your Majesty has ordered the great offensive in the west."

In conclusion, Hindenburg asked the Kaiser to decide what steps should be taken in the future when himself and Ludendorff came to loggerheads with the members of the Government. The Kaiser was exceedingly upset as he perused the memoir, which he handed to the Chancellor of the Reich, who, in turn, passed it on to von Kühlmann. The two ministers replied with dramatic promptitude to Hindenburg's memoir. Von Kühlmann very definitely challenged the claim advanced in the memoir that, by the Kaiser's orders, Hindenburg and Ludendorff would have an authoritative voice in the peace negotiations.

This contention on the part of the Supreme Command was not in keeping with the principles underlying the German constitution. Von Kühlmann also raised an objection against the demand advanced by the Supreme Command for territorial annexations. He had no objection "against flying the German flag in the eastern frontier states," but he very strongly deprecated the suggestion of "nailing the flag to the mast at any time." Furthermore, von Kühlmann contended that the broad strip of frontier demanded by the Supreme Command would not prove of any particular advantage in the event of a new war. And most decidedly Germany's internal and domestic policy ought not to be turned topsy-turvy for the sake of a few square miles of territory. He very strongly repudiated the suggestion that the Foreign Office had not handled the preliminaries to the peace negotiations competently, and added that the steps taken by the German representatives at Brest-Litovsk had been in exact accordance with the wishes of the Kaiser. The time had not arrived for expressing a view as to what political demands would be put forward after they had attained the victory they all yearned for in the west. "The decision as to the course to be adopted lies with His Majesty," von Kühlmann's letter concluded.

But before he had received von Kühlmann's letter, Hindenburg had written a personal letter to the Chancellor of the Reich, in which he reiterated his threat that himself and Ludendorff would resign if the wishes of the Supreme Command were not gratified. "We are both only too conscious that we are not merely toying with this idea, and we would not approach His Majesty with such a request, if we were not impelled to do so by our own consciences," ran a passage from this letter. He added that as a result of recent happenings he had grave doubts whether the negotiations at Brest-Litovsk would bring

about even passably satisfactory results. Nevertheless, he agreed that at any rate it would be possible now to face the Russians at the conference table in the attitude of conquerors. "Germany has had the great luck," his concluding words ran, "to have got rid of Count Czernin's declaration about a general peace, owing to the fact that the Entente Powers do not intend putting in an appearance at Brest-Litovsk."

Contrary to what everyone expected, the Chancellor of the Reich, Count Hertling, also adopted a challenging tone towards the Supreme Command. "In political matters," he said, "the views of His Majesty can only be interpreted by one responsible official, his chancellor. Were it otherwise, there would be nothing but wholesale confusion. The representations of the Supreme Command will be given due consideration in view of their great importance when we are arriving at political decisions. To what extent their representations will be accepted can only be decided by His Majesty acting on the advice of his duly accredited and responsible chancellor. The special position which Field-Marshal von Hindenburg and General Ludendorff hold makes it essential that their personal views and theories should receive greater consideration than can normally be conceded to the Supreme military authorities by the Government. It seems to me an utterly irregular attitude on the part of the Field-Marshal and General Ludendorff to make the discharge of their indispensable military activities contingent upon political issues, the expediency of which, in accordance with constitutional procedure, is exclusively the function of the Crown and of its constitutionally responsible adviser. But should the great trust which the German people have placed in the two leaders of our armies be developed to such a degree in the domain of politics that their political views should have the force of mandates that could not be

challenged, they could only fulfil their dual functions after they were authoritatively vested with a joint military and political dictatorship. Personally I could not conscientiously advise such a solution of the problem, inasmuch as the fusion of the military and political executives in one man's hands would circumscribe the privileges and would run counter to the principles of our constitution. Such an alteration in our system of government would, I am inclined to think, lead to serious domestic consequences for Germany."

Thus was the attempt of the Supreme Command to encroach on the domain of the civil government averted. A propos of this, the following extract from Ludendorff's memoirs is significant: "Several men approached me with the suggestion that I should seek the office of Chancellor of the Reich. The suggestion was a mistaken one, though no doubt its authors meant well. The work which I had already had to do was overwhelming. In order to lead the World War, I had to keep the machinery of war in proper control. This calls for a tremendous expenditure of energy. It was unthinkable that in addition I should take on my shoulders the control of such an abnormally complicated government machinery—a task which would demand the undivided attention of one man. Germany at this time needed a dictator—but a dictator who would live in Berlin—not at Army Headquarters. And this dictator would need to be a man who had a thorough knowledge of the conditions of the civilian population. Berlin would probably have followed his lead. But it was a task which I felt I could not assume. I had debated the matter anxiously in my own mind before I came to this decision."

There can be no doubt, however, that Ludendorff had expected quite a different sequel to his attacks on the Government. Instead of a victory over the Chancellor of

the Reich and the "sluggish" diplomatic service, he received a very sharp rebuff. The Kaiser thought that it was for himself to decide whether the Supreme Command or the Government should have control of Germany's destiny. In a letter to Hindenburg in his own handwriting, dated January 24th, the Kaiser said: "I heartily thank you for the soldierly candour and the lucidity with which you have expressed your convictions. My confidence in both of you cannot be shaken by the fact that both myself and my political adviser, the Chancellor of the Reich, differ from you on many points. It is both your right and your duty to emphasise your views as forcibly as possible, just as it is the duty of the ministers who are responsible to me to stress the points on which they differ from you. And then it is for me to decide."

The Kaiser went on to express his hope that both Hindenburg and Ludendorff would waive their misunderstandings in order to be able to devote all their energies to the actual task of directing the war. In the last paragraph of his letter he assured Hindenburg that nothing was further from his mind than the idea of turning a deaf ear to his extremely valuable advice.

"I earnestly beg of you," ran his concluding words, "not to withhold that valuable advice from me in the future, and remain,

Your affectionate and grateful King,
WILLIAM. R."

Despite this setback which they had received, the Supreme Command asserted their will in all essential points at Brest-Litovsk. In replying to the Russian proposal for a general peace, von Kühlmann and the Austrian Foreign Minister had agreed to the formula that all claims to the compulsory annexation of territory would be waived. The Russians were so carried away with

emotion when they had secured this point that they proclaimed it with a great flourish of trumpets to the whole world. It was agreed to stay all further proceedings for ten days to see whether the Entente Powers would respond to this dramatic appeal and send representatives to the conference table. When assenting to the offer to waive all territorial claims, General Hoffmann had registered this mental resolution: "It all depends on the attitude adopted by the other enemies of the Central Powers."

The representatives of the Entente, however, made no response, but despite this, the Russians believed that they would be able to arrange for peace terms which would not involve any sacrifice of territory. They calculated that all territorial questions would be arranged quite automatically on the principle of self-determination. The representatives of the Bolshevik Government took it for granted that the immediate sequel to a peace based on the principle of waiving territorial claim would be the evacuation of the region occupied by Germany. They mentally visualised the automatic disappearance of the last German soldier across the German frontiers. But General Hauptmann drew their attention to the fact that the evacuation of the occupied territories had been contingent on the appearance of the representatives of the Entente Powers at the conference table, and that as the Entente had ignored their appeal, the question of evacuation of territories did not arise. Whereupon the Bolsheviks charged the Germans with breach of faith, and announced their intention of forthwith withdrawing from the conference table. It is quite conceivable that the Russians should consider the question of the evacuation of territory of paramount importance. They had fully expected that all the provinces which the Germans had overrun during the war would be immediately restored to them, and that, *pari passu*, the problem of the independence of Poland and of the frontier

States would be solved. But in consequence of the disappointment of the hopes of bringing about a general discussion of peace terms, neither the Government nor the Supreme Command would consider the idea of handing over the whole east to the Bolsheviki, whose encroachment on Germany would be inevitable, if they did so. The negotiations proved inconclusive, and the conference was postponed in consequence of an announcement made by the Russians that they had to return to Petrograd to receive further instructions.

A suggestion made by the Russians that further negotiations should be held in some neutral country, was turned down by the Germans. The Russians gave way with rather bad grace, and in the first weeks of January the discussions were resumed between them and the Central Powers in Brest-Litovsk. At the resumed conference a representative appeared from the Ukraine, which in accordance with the right of self-determination which had been advocated by the Russians themselves, had cut adrift from Soviet Russia and proclaimed itself a republic. In addition to Joffe, there was a second representative of Soviet Russia at the conference. This was Trotsky, the Russian Foreign Minister, who from the very start of the proceedings did most of the talking, and displayed inexhaustible oratorical powers. In an extremely long-winded speech which he delivered on January 11th, Trotsky described the "so-called right of self-determination of the nations" as a mere pretext for carrying on a policy of territorial annexation. There were several sharp interchanges between him and the representatives of the Central Powers. All eyes were centred on Trotsky. Several valuable days passed by without any indication of the ending of the deadlock in the negotiations. General Hoffmann saw that there was no chance of any progress at this rate of going, and that there was nothing to be gained by wasting time with these endless discussions.

He decided that the Russians must be made to realise that the time had come to get down to facts.

The German ministers chafed just as much as General Hoffmann did against the boredom of Trotsky's irrelevant Bolshevik propaganda.

"Pass the ball to me to-morrow as soon as you get an opening," whispered General Hoffmann to von Kühlmann. "This can't go on any longer! Just say: 'General Hoffmann will now address the conference.'"

On the following morning Kamenev was the first speaker. He spoke in a pompous hectoring voice, and gave the impression that in his view the Russians dominated the military situation. When he paused for a moment from sheer exhaustion, von Kühlmann rose, and, bowing to the delegates, said: "General Hoffmann will now address the conference."

General Hoffmann sprang to his feet. The tone adopted by Kamenev had exasperated him, and he began by reminding the Russian delegates rather acidly that they had utterly misjudged the situation. He added that the less they had to say about "mailed fist" tactics the better, in view of the brutality with which they themselves had mowed down their opponents in Minsk with machine-gun-fire. Finally he gave the Russians his ultimatum. It was for them to choose between a peace settlement there and then or a resumption of hostilities. The melodramatic bang of his fist on the table to clinch his ultimatum is, however, a myth.

This dramatic climax to the negotiations created quite a sensation throughout the Central Powers. The German Left Press made a violent onslaught on the Government, and said that the military authorities were aiming at territorial annexations by force, despite all the assurances that had been given to the contrary. They did not want a peace based on mutual agreement, but an enforced peace

based on their own victories in the field. Very serious labour riots broke out in Vienna as the result of the news that there was a likelihood of a resumption of the war against Russia. The Austrian workers declared that they would not fight against the "workers', peasants' and soldiers' government" of Russia. The position was aggravated by a very serious famine which ensued. The Vienna government were unable to cope with it, and begged for assistance from Germany, and Germany, hard set though she was herself, had to come to the rescue of her ally, to prevent her total collapse. The time had passed when Germany could look to Austria-Hungary for support; henceforth she could only regard her as a heavy burden which she had to drag along with her as best she could.

On February 10th Trotsky suddenly broke off negotiations with the curt declaration that the war was over. On the same night the Russians left Brest-Litovsk, after peace had been declared with the Ukraine. This abrupt ending of peace parleys cleared the way for Hindenburg and Ludendorff. Ludendorff was now in a position to insist on the putting into effect of the following conditions, which he had instructed General Hoffmann to lay before the Conference on December 16th, 1917:

"The federation of Lithuania and Courland, including the Gulf of Riga and the islands therein will be federated with Germany, as we need an increase of territory in order to feed our people. It is our duty to show all due regard for the national aspirations of the people of Lithuania and Courland in the manner in which their federation with us is established."

In reality, what the Supreme Command meant by "federation" was a more or less complete annexation. The independence granted to the new states which were about to be created had no political significance. Both in an economic and in a military sense these regions were

to be perpetually under German control. The German Government did not expressly approve of those arrangements, but, on the other hand, it did not oppose them. Austria-Hungary was not in a position to make any comment, as she was entirely dependent on Germany for her food supplies.

The Russians made no move to return to Brest-Litovsk to sign the peace treaty. As far as they were concerned Trotsky's curt declaration had ended the war. On February 15th the Soviet Government gave orders for general demobilisation, allowing the world to draw the obvious inference that they had given up any idea of military resistance. Trotsky very shrewdly calculated that, in view of the disaffection that was rife among their own workers, the Central Powers would not resume war against the Soviet Republic. For all that the Supreme Command were masters of the situation as their front-line troops were still stationed in the eastern theatre of war. At noon on February 18th the army groups under Eichhorn and Lessingen were ordered to advance to Reval and Ukraine respectively. As the Bolsheviks fell back without fighting, Livonia and Esthonia were in the hands of the Germans in the course of a few days. In order to avoid worse, the Russians turned up at Brest-Litovsk on March 3rd to sign the peace treaty. But there were no further negotiations.

On March 15th, 1918, provisional peace terms were arranged with Roumania. The demands which the Supreme Command urged with regard to Roumania were very sweeping, and the Government was in favour of imposing very drastic terms. To begin with, the payment of a war indemnity was insisted upon. Furthermore, Roumania was ordered to hand over several tracts of Crown lands and important petroleum wells and railways to German companies. This entailed the establishment

of permanent economic control by Germany. It was also stipulated that Roumania's finances would be permanently controlled by Germany. In the military sphere the terms of peace insisted upon the demobilisation of the Roumanian forces, the reduction of the size of her standing army and the handing over of a portion of war material. In addition, military occupation of the country for a period of not less than five years after the end of the war was stipulated. After protracted negotiations an agreement was reached between Germany and Roumania for a ninety-years' lease of extensive petroleum areas. Roumania was also obliged to agree to supply Germany and Austria with grain for a considerable number of years.

Ludendorff was most emphatic in urging that Constanza should be converted into a German fortress. The Bulgarians and Turks vehemently protested against this suggestion. The idea that their powerful ally should have a fortress on the Black Sea did not appeal to either of these states. A series of heated discussions about Constanza ensued, among the members of the Quadruple Alliance, during the course of which the German Government scored against the Supreme Command. Ludendorff failed, likewise, in his demand that the Hohenzollern dynasty in Roumania should be abolished. Bulgaria, depending on a promise given by Falkenhayn, claimed that all the Dobruja should be handed over to her, but had to be satisfied with the southern part of that region, while northern Dobruja passed under the joint control of the Quadruple Alliance.

The Treaty of Bucharest was never ratified. Military and political events crowded so rapidly on top of one another that it was side-tracked. The Roumanian Government, under all kinds of pretexts, managed to postpone its ratification by parliament. However, they could not prevent the Supreme Command from taking

everything out of the country that was needed for any of the theatres of war. Indeed, were it not for the petroleum they got from Roumania, the Germans would scarcely have been able to continue the war. But the collecting of foodstuffs and raw materials proved a very difficult task. The country's harvest outlook was unfavourable. The Roumanian peasants were afraid that they would presently be left without food for themselves. Extremely harsh coercive steps had been adopted to compel the refractory farmers to give up their hoarded grain. All this took time, and as, meanwhile, the position of Germany and her allies became more and more acute from day to day, the Roumanian Government conveniently forgot all about the signing of the peace treaty. The whole country was waiting for the collapse of Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary. Unfortunately their expectations were fulfilled.

CHAPTER X

THE SUPREME COMMAND'S WILD HOPES

IN spite of all obstacles the Supreme Command had succeeded in all its main objectives on the Eastern Front, but it was March, 1918, by the time all was clear on that theatre of war. The supreme moment had come to seek for a definite decision in the west, as otherwise all the sacrifices that had been made during the previous years would have been in vain. The Supreme Command prepared very exhaustive post-war plans for France and Belgium. These ambitious schemes could only be carried through, however, if the enemy on the Western Front were defeated, and for that purpose it was necessary to expend the last available ounce of energy of the already exhausted German Empire.

On September 11th, 1917, the Kaiser, the Chancellor of the Reich, Hindenburg and Ludendorff thoroughly discussed the post-war objectives that had been outlined by the Supreme Command. They were very drastic, and formed a very unpleasant precedent for the harsh terms imposed by the subsequent conquerors. Bethmann-Hollweg had solemnly guaranteed full compensation to Belgium for the war-damage done by the German army. Now the annexation of Liège, with an adequate "safety zone" in its vicinity along the German frontiers as well as the economic and military federation of Belgium with Germany, was demanded. It was decided that Belgium

would be occupied for several years by German troops. Unless Belgium were occupied for many years it was considered that an economic federation with Belgium would be futile. After the termination of the period of occupation the frontiers of Liège would exercise the necessary pressure on Belgium and would protect the German industrial zone from the danger of attack. In a memoir addressed to the Kaiser Hindenburg stated emphatically the demands of the Supreme Command. "It is only when we are in permanent and undisputed occupation of Liège that we can make the military and administrative arrangements which circumstances demand. Consequently I cannot entertain the suggestion that we should evacuate Liège at the end of any definite period."

Ludendorff likewise drew up a memoir, dated September 11th, 1917. He was aware at that time that conditions among the civilian population of Germany were steadily growing worse, and accordingly he was relatively moderate and conciliatory in his war objectives. Of course, he would not visualise "a peace treaty which would not ensure for us all the most essential requisites for the safeguarding of our subsequent economic development and entrench us so firmly in our military and economic position, that we could face a new defensive war with equanimity." All these "essential requisites," however, in Ludendorff's estimation could only be secured by a considerable increase of territory—to wit, by annexations. "Our mineral deposits and our industrial areas, the memoir went on, "lie extremely dangerously near the frontiers of the Reich. We must protect Upper Silesia by acquisition of further territory. In the west we have the two great industrial areas, the Luxemburg and Lorraine copper-mines, the Saar district and the Lower Rhine and Westphalian industrial regions which will extend more and more towards the Belgian and Dutch frontiers. The

safeguarding of these is for us a vital matter. . . . Otherwise, at the commencement of hostilities, our industries would be paralysed and wrecked. Furthermore, there are mines in the region which we propose to annex. What the coast of Belgium is to us for the purpose of air-raids on England, the line of the Meuse at Liège is to our industrial zone. We must keep a firm hand on the territory on both sides of the Meuse and south of it towards St. Vith. But even the possession of the Meuse line alone is not sufficient to guarantee the safety of the industrial areas. . . . We must arrange that Belgium is so closely associated with us in an economic sense that it will also look for a political *rapprochement* with us. I consider that this would be feasible, if Belgium, after having been closely attached to Germany in the economic sphere, and having been partitioned into the states of Wallonia and Flamland, would, in the course of time, seek protection against England and France, and, after the end of the period of occupation, would have an army and navy of its own."

Further contentions in this memoir are indicative of the obsessions of this politically-minded general, who would go down to history as a greater man if he had confined himself to his military tasks. In his view the inevitable sequel to a federation of Belgium with Germany would be that Holland would be drawn more closely to us, especially if her colonial possessions were safeguarded by our close association with Japan. Thus we would get in touch with the seaboard facing England, and would reach the goal which our navy was striving for with full consciousness of its importance. We would attain a position with regard to England which would enable us to protect our commerce during the next war. But Ludendorff was not satisfied with all this. Later on in his memoirs he pressed for markets in Russia and in South America. He insisted



HINDENBURG TAKES THE OATH AS PRESIDENT OF THE REICH



HINDENBURG IN 1925

on the establishment of a great colonial empire in Africa and secure naval bases both inside and outside the German colonial region.

Ludendorff went on to point out that in case they failed to secure a firm footing permanently on the Flemish coast, the German navy would be entitled to seek for overseas naval bases which could be used for the purpose of smashing England's control of the seas. These bases would be essential to guarantee Germany's freedom of movement over the oceans and ensure the uninterrupted overseas transport of foodstuffs and other commodities.

Ludendorff always took it for granted that soon after the World War was over there would be another World War. In his view the final victory in the west, which would ensure Germany's dominance in Europe, was already as good as won. But he believed firmly that the old Entente, or at least England and France, would once more do all that they could to destroy Germany's power again. He regarded the neutrality of Belgium as a mere mirage, and would never discuss it as a serious proposition.

Ludendorff's visualisation of the position of post-war Germany was probably quite justifiable even in 1916 from the purely military point of view, but at the beginning of our last great offensive it was indicative of a fatal misconception of our war position to entertain such a view.

Hindenburg was depending upon the fact that with the aid of the forces in the east, which were now available after the conclusion of peace with Russia and Roumania, it would be possible for the first time to have a superiority in mere man-power. This superiority, however, could not counter-balance the superiority of the enemy in artillery, aircraft, tanks and other engines of war.

The Field-Marshal was firmly convinced that our enemies were intent on our utter destruction. "We had always the alternatives before us of a fight to a victorious finish or of degradation to the level of helots," runs an extract from his memoirs. "Did our enemies ever express themselves save in terms of ruthless determination to crush us utterly? Most decidedly I never heard them express a single word to induce me to think that there was any hope for us if we were beaten. If any such conciliatory word—if any single expression of a desire for peace was ever uttered—it never percolated through the atmosphere that lay between me and the enemy statesmen. Under the circumstances how could I relinquish my absolute confidence in the success of our cause, and recommend a suspension of hostilities to my Kaiser, to my Fatherland, and to my own conscience? In my opinion we possessed sufficient strength and sufficient war-like spirit for the last victorious encounter."

This was quite a reasonable attitude for a soldier to take. But one cannot help wondering why the Supreme Command never took into account to what extent the Entente Powers were impelled towards this determination to annihilate us by our own war aims, which were well known to them. Still the responsibility for this mistaken policy did not rest with the military authorities, but with the Government, in allowing the reins of power to slip out of their hands and permitting the Supreme Command to encroach upon their domain. As soon as the German Government realised that their country had no chance of winning a decisive engagement—and the collapse of the Schlieffen plan should have made this abundantly clear to them—it was their duty, even if they had to override the wish of the Supreme Command to do so, to devote all their energies, even at the cost of sacrificing German territory, to make peace as soon as possible, in

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order to save the German people from further futile sacrifices of life and property. A commander-in-chief is entitled for the sake of honour to see even a hopeless battle through to the bitter finish, but a statesman is not.

CHAPTER XI

COLLAPSE OF THE WESTERN FRONT

THE winter of 1917-1918 had left Germany considerably weaker than the previous winters of the war. Not only among the civilian population, but also in the army the first indications of collapse began to appear. At the time when Hindenburg and Ludendorff were preparing for their decisive blow in the west, the German sword had already become blunt and rusty. The time could not be far off when it would buckle and splinter in the hand of the fighter. Even the most brilliant and determined commander could not defeat his enemy with such a weapon. The army no longer possessed the same zest for fighting which had been typical of it in 1914. The soldiers were both badly fed and badly clothed. War-weariness was rampant. Pacifist and Bolshevik propaganda had invidiously filtered into the moral fibre of the fighting men. During the winter conditions went from bad to worse. Discipline had become considerably lax. The subordinate commands had to make allowance for the war-weariness of the troops. They dare not any longer adopt the old-time Prussian hectoring methods. But the Supreme Command were not fully aware of the extent to which this dry rot had set in among the soldiers. Forced to temporise with their cynical, disillusioned men, the subordinate commanders adopted a "hush hush" policy. They pretended not to see or to hear the indications of revulsion against the war. The result was that Hindenburg and

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Ludendorff overrated the fighting spirit of the men. Without getting time to rest, the hard-bitten stalwart shock troops were hurled again and again into the fray until they were utterly exhausted and were able to fight no more. Though he was not quite aware of it, Hindenburg had no longer the same reliable fighting machine which he had had at Tannenberg.

At the suggestion of the army leaders the German Supreme Command was transferred from Kreuznach to Spa at the Kaiser's orders, in order to be within easier reach of the most important sectors of the Western Front. The preparations for the great fight which had the code word "Michael" had been made a long time previously. All that was needed was to name the day and hour of the attack.

The following is the full text of the ill-omened document "Michael" :

“ GENERAL HEADQUARTERS,
10.3.18.

I

His Majesty has given the following instructions :

The 'Michael' Offensive will open on March 31st. The first-line trenches of the enemy will be stormed at 9.40 a.m.

2

The Army Group of Prince Rupprecht will score the first tactical victory by cutting off the English in the Cambrai salient and will seize the Croisilles (south-east of Arras)—Bapaume—Peronne line. If the attack of the Right Wing (17th Army) is successful, it is to advance further past Croisilles.

The Army Group will make a further drive in the direction of Arras—Albert, and with its Left Wing it will hold the Somme at Peronne, and the main attack will be made with

the Right Wing in order to stagger the English Army prior to the advance of the Sixth Army and clear the way for the forward dash of further German troops from the trenches.

3

The Army Group of the German Crown Prince will first advance along the Somme to the south of Peronne, and the Chozat Canal, to the west of La Fère. The 18th Army (the Right Wing of the Army Group of the German Crown Prince) will make a swift advance and force the crossing of the Somme and the Canal."

Hindenburg shrewdly gauged how the soldiers would react to the emancipation from static warfare, as the the following extract from his memoirs shows : "I knew that the steel-helmeted German soldiers, who had been compelled to crouch like rabbits under the earth for years in mouldy trenches, would gladly seize the opportunity of ending the long-drawn-out agony by a triumphant advance." Indeed the spirits of the soldiers rose considerably during the last month before the March offensive, when large drafts were liberated from the slimy trenches to undergo behind the lines their final training for the great offensive in France. The men were thrilled at the prospect of a resumption of the warfare of movement, and of advancing in the open instead of being buried eternally in the muddy fetid trenches. They were quite prepared to face any risks attendant on warfare in the open in preference to returning to the appalling monotony of static warfare. They were eager to come to hand-grips with the enemy. Most of the soldiers on the Western Front had had no experience of mobile warfare, but they all agreed that it was infinitely preferable to trench-warfare. At any rate it was not monotonous, and there was an atmosphere of adventure about it, they decided. While waiting for the great

"Michael" offensive their mouths watered as they thought of the ample stores of bully beef, biscuit and rum which they were very soon to commandeer from the overfed English soldiers who would flee helter-skelter before their triumphant onset. And there were some German lads who, under the joint stimulus of hunger and a spirit of adventure, chafed against waiting for the junketting that would follow the "Michael" offensive, and, sticking a few hand-grenades in their belts, crawled under cover of dark across "No-Man's-Land" towards the enemy trenches, and returned in triumph with kegs of rum and biscuits galore.

Knots of starving "field greys" would huddle together in their dug-outs, and tighten their belts to still the pangs of hunger, as they listened to the men who had been fighting on the Eastern Front, in Poland, in the Balkans and in Italy, recounting their thrilling adventures in the happy bygone days when they followed hot on the heels of the fleeing enemy all day, and settled down for their night's repose in comfortable quarters—not in stinking, dripping trenches.

Preparations were made with the greatest care for the great offensive. The officers were kept very busy training their men. Most elaborate steps were taken to ensure that the tactics of the offensive would be successful. The supplies of ammunition and all other war material were, however, insufficient to cope with the demands of such a colossal enterprise as Germany was about to undertake. The Commissariat had, it is true, somewhat improved during the last few weeks before the offensive, but in comparison with that of the enemy, it was utterly inadequate.

Neither did the Supreme Command succeed, despite the fact that they drew their last available supplies of manpower, in bringing their divisions up to full fighting strength. Desperate efforts were made to comb out every

man from the factories and workshops that could possibly be spared in Germany, but the results attained were extremely poor from the point of view of military efficiency. For the most part these emergency recruits were either raw, inexperienced lads, or men who were far too old for front-line service. Youths of the age of nineteen had been fighting since 1917, and at the moment all the other boys of the same age had been called up and were undergoing training for the front. Even the enlistment of lads of eighteen was being seriously considered by the army authorities. These youngsters, however, proved themselves very poor material for soldiering. Most of them had grown up under the very lax discipline that prevailed during the previous war years, while their fathers and teachers had been fighting at the front, and their physique showed all the evidence of inadequate nourishment. Owing to the great shortage of man-labour, a considerable number of these lads had from time to time earned big wages in the German factories before they were called up, and they had squandered their easily earned money with reckless profligacy. The patriotic enthusiasm of the earlier war years had long since evaporated, and most of these cynical boy recruits fully believed that they were engaged in a battle that was already lost, and that the cause for which they were being driven into the shambles was an unjust—nay, even a criminal one. These degenerate striplings did not want to fight at all, and were at no pains to conceal their feelings. Their effect upon the men who had borne the brunt of the fight for years was depressing and demoralising.

But for all that the Supreme Command kept on insisting that the very last available man should be rushed to the front. In a letter to the Minister of War, Hindenburg insisted on a more sweeping substitution of women for men in all spheres of industry. "I am convinced," runs a passage

from this letter, "that a considerable amount of manpower is absorbed in various industrial enterprises which should be deflected to the Western Front. Constant supervision, in my opinion, is necessary in order to prevent such a wastage at a crisis like this." And later on in his letter, he emphasised the need of restrictions of all forms of industrial productions which were not of absolutely vital importance.

Hindenburg's anxiety to strain every nerve to get men to fill up the gaps in his divisions raised a problem which it was not easy to solve. How could the complex and colossal system of war industries be maintained in Germany if the army insisted on absorbing the industrial workers more and more? In order to secure the requisite reserves for the front, the Supreme Command was obliged to retrench more and more the output of war material. Still, there was no alternative. Hindenburg considered that it was first of all of paramount importance to push the imminent great offensive to a victorious issue, and that for this purpose men were for the moment far more essential than war material. Apparently in his anxiety to do everything possible to score this conclusive victory, he was prepared to face the risk that, if it were unsuccessful, there would be a shortage of munitions for ensuing battles that might prove disastrous. The Minister of War, who was responsible for the steady supply of munitions, saw the terrible risks entailed by the step which Hindenburg insisted on taking, and he only gave way after considerable misgiving and after prolonged wranglings with the Supreme Command.

When laying the plans for the great offensive in the west before the Kaiser on February 13th, 1918, Ludendorff told him that the imminent attack would be the "most stupendous military task" that any army had ever tackled—a task which England and France had striven in vain for two years to accomplish. And truly it was a "most

stupendous task," and it needed a very optimistic frame of mind to hope for the success of a venture which was bound to subject our troops to ordeals surpassing the powers of human endurance.

Earnest protests were made by shrewd members of the civilian population against this reckless optimism of the Supreme Command. It was pointed out that Germany no longer had sufficient strength to deliver costly thrusts which would devour such enormous quantities of ammunition and entail an expenditure of other commodities which it would be extremely difficult to make good. It was pointed out that the army horses were starving, and that there was a shortage of petrol for the lorries. If the French and English had failed to effect a "break through," despite an enormous expenditure of war material and appalling casualty lists, how could Germany, in her exhausted condition, hope to succeed, they asked. It was contended that it would be impossible to break through the complicated system of the enemy's defences, and that, presuming even that a breach were effected in his front lines, he could very quickly fill up the gap with the aid of his strongly entrenched rear defences and his magnificent lines of communication. In fact the opponents of the imminent offensive declared that it would be nothing short of a miracle if an effective "break through," which would roll up the enemy lines, could be carried out. They urged that the German army should be satisfied with holding its ground, in the hope that terms of peace by mutual arrangement might soon be arranged, whereas if, as a result of a collapse of the proposed attack, we were too weak even to hold our ground, we could find ourselves compelled to accept any conditions that the Entente choose to impose on us.

But these warning voices spoke in vain. We know at the present day that it would have been possible early in

1918 to arrange terms of peace based on negotiations with our enemies. The famous pronouncements about peace, delivered by President Wilson and Lloyd George before the start of the great German offensive, had quite a different ring from their previous manifestos. The French were utterly dismayed at the change of tone of their two great allies. Still, despite French pique, an offer of peace made by Germany to the English statesman in his then pessimistic mood would very probably have been accepted, provided we agreed to give up all claims to territorial annexations both on the Eastern and Western Fronts. The Supreme Command, however, still believed that they could make good their great war objectives, and curtly brushed aside any suggestions about peace.

The following is an extract from an article written for a leading English paper by Leo Marc, who loathed Germany with an all-consuming hate, regarding conditions in the early spring of 1918: "Had the enemy at that time uttered a reassuring statement about Belgium, we would have entered into negotiations, and England's trouble would soon have been over."

And even after the tremendous tactical success of the great battle in France at the end of March an offer of peace by Germany would have been entertained. The French Government had made all preparations for transferring the various ministries to Bordeaux, while the French generals had now only one great objective—the defence of their capital—and the English Commander-in-Chief was contemplating a retreat to the Channel Ports. Even Ludendorff would admit to-day that in May and June, 1918, the Entente Powers were more disposed to come to terms than they were at any time previously or subsequently.

The invertebrate, vacillating Government committed a very serious sin against their country in not keeping Hindenburg fully appraised of the splendid opportunities

that were let slip by of coming to an honourable understanding with our enemies. They were also to blame for not asserting their own authority against the dictation of the Supreme Command. Instead of pulling together, the Government and the Supreme Command played an eternal game of hide-and-seek with one another. It was just a repetition of the same disastrous bungling that occurred in the summer of 1914. At that time Prince Lichnowsky, the German Ambassador in London, and the shrewd diplomat Kühlmann had succeeded in smoothing away all the points of variance that had kept Germany and England apart, and in bringing into close accord to their mutual future advantage those two nations whose peoples came from a common stock. But even in those critical days after the Serajevo assassination, Bethmann-Hollweg did not deem it necessary to inform the German General Staff and the Minister of War of those vital diplomatic negotiations. If the German Government had succeeded in postponing the declaration of war for a few weeks, there would probably have been no declaration of war at all. It is very questionable whether the General Staff, had they been fully aware of the state of affairs, would not at any rate have given up the idea of the invasion of Belgium—a blunder which forced England to side with our enemies.

As soon as the Supreme Command had made the fateful decision to embark on the great offensive, they should have made it at a place where there was the greatest chance of its being successful. But to do so they would have to marshal all their available forces, even if in order to do so they had to abandon other enterprises. They should have patterned themselves on Hindenburg's action at Tannenberg, where the last reserves were brought to bear on the enemy, in order to be able to concentrate overwhelming forces on the vital part of the battle front and

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effect a "break through." The method adopted early in 1918 was the exact opposite of this. Strong German forces were all the time concentrated on many of the most unimportant sectors of the Western Front, whereas great stretches of the front could have been simply abandoned, in order to concentrate the utmost driving power on the decisive thrust. The strong fortresses of Metz and Strasbourg were in a position to deal with the French forces in Alsace-Lorraine. But for political reasons they were afraid to venture to leave Alsace-Lorraine even for the time being in the hands of the French. Neither in the east nor in the west could they bring themselves to yield up any territory which they had taken possession of. Every bulge on the front line, even though the holding of it might demand an enormous number of troops, was jealously guarded. It is true that between November 1st, 1917, and the middle of March, 1918, eight divisions were drafted from Italy and forty divisions were drafted from the east to the Western Front. But they were not sufficient to cope with the task before them. By the middle of March there were on the Western Front 192 German divisions with 136,118 officers, 3,438,288 men and 710,827 horses, as against 97 French, 57 English and 10 Belgian divisions, to which were added one American and two Portuguese divisions. That looks at first rather favourable for the Germans, but it must be remembered that the strength of a German division was considerably lower than that of any enemy divisions, while the Entente armies were far superior in war material. And all this time there were still in the east 53 divisions with 40,095 officers, 1,004,955 men and 281,770 horses. It was a fatal mistake to have left such a large force in the east. The Supreme Command, however, held the view that this army of over 1,000,000 men was needed to hold in check Roumania, the Ukraine and the East generally. It was true that we found it necessary

to keep an eye on Roumania in order to make sure that she supplied us with grain, raw materials and petroleum. The Western army, but especially the horses, could not have been supplied with food, were it not for the fact that we got at least 250,000 tons of maize from Roumania during the months of March and April, as well as 100,000 tons of flour and grain. Not that the Roumanian peasant delivered any of this food at his own free will. It had all to be confiscated—a task which entailed the employment of soldiers. At the beginning of the great spring offensive on the west there were in Roumania 4 infantry divisions, 29 battalions of “Landsturm” troops, 6 regiments of cavalry, 1 regiment of field artillery and 14 heavy batteries. It must be admitted, however, that these troops were of relatively little value as fighting men. They were, for the most part, men of over fifty years of age, and would hardly have been physically capable of standing the strain of a campaign on the Western Front. A good 40 per cent of them were really unfit for military service, even of the easiest kind. The occupation of the Ukraine, on the other hand, was a serious blunder. During the entire period of its occupation by our troops only 2750 waggons of grain were despatched to Germany. This works out at something like one pound of grain per head of the population. And all the foodstuffs of various kinds that came from the Ukraine would scarcely amount to four pounds per head of the population. To make matters worse, a considerable amount of this scanty contribution of food had gone bad by the time it reached Germany. And in order to secure this wretched result there were twenty divisions held up in the Ukraine which were very sorely needed for the great offensive in the west.

The hopes, too, that had been centred on Russia for food supplies for the army and the people had proved too

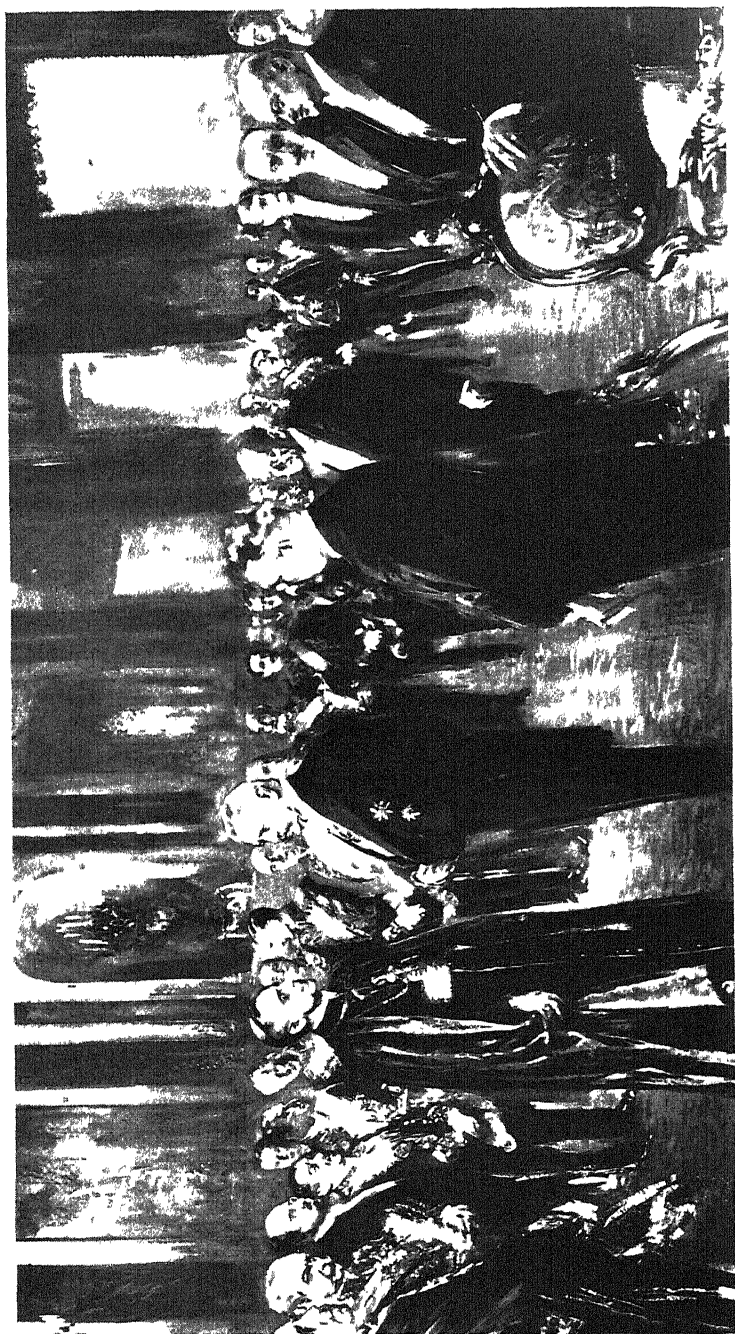
elusive. Even before the armistice with Russia the Supreme Command, in co-operation with the various responsible Government departments, had drawn up detailed statements about the various commodities which they would be able to secure from that country. It was also intended to resume trade with Russia at once. German officials reckoned that they would need 1,000,000 tons of Russian grain. To secure the transport of this vast supply of grain a German Commission was sent to Russia. The Commission, however, very soon discovered that there would be no grain forthcoming from Russia. During the negotiations at Brest-Litovsk the Soviet Government refused to supply Germany with food-stuffs. But as soon as the Supreme Command realised that there was no food to be got from Russia and the Ukraine, they should have evacuated the Eastern Front in view of the momentous decision that was imminent in the west. They stayed on merely through political considerations. They were afraid that, once their backs were turned, Russia would seize the opportunity of seizing again the frontier states which had been established as a result of the peace negotiations. Furthermore, the Entente could still depend upon a good deal of support in Russia, and there was the risk that by a lavish expenditure of money they might succeed in overthrowing the Bolshevik Government and mobilise new Russian armies against Germany. But, above all things, the German Government were afraid of the seed which they themselves had sown. They were determined now that the Bolshevik virus should be kept as far away as possible from the German frontiers. And, indeed, their anxiety was well-founded. Had there been a Red Army on the frontiers of East Prussia in November, 1918, the German Revolution might have taken a different course, and the history of the world might have taken a different orientation. We would never have had to sign the Treaty of

Versailles, but Germany would probably have been laid in ruins.

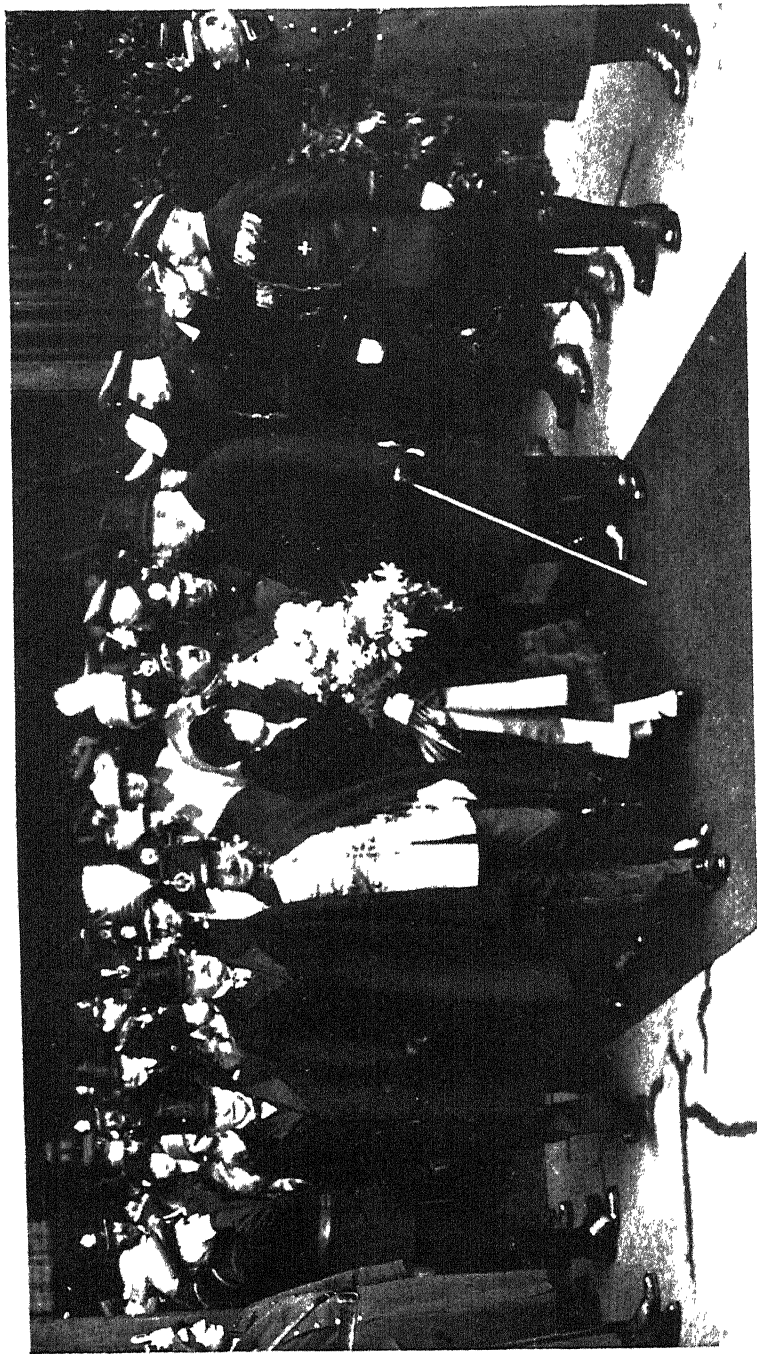
The help against Bolshevism given by us to the frontier states was partially responsible for the failure of the great offensive in the west. Finland, Turkey, Macedonia, the Caucasus and the Crimea also absorbed another million soldiers who were sorely needed in the west. Had we been able to give up the east altogether at this critical period we would have been numerically superior to the enemy, and we would probably have been able to develop our initial tactical success into a strategic one, and to compel the enemy to come to terms with us. And surely it ought to have been possible afterwards for a victorious German army to get rid of the Bolshevik regime and to establish a democratic government in Moscow which would be on friendly terms with us. At that period Lenin and Trotsky were in a rather shaky position. The Don Cossacks were ready at a moment's notice to fight against the Soviet Government, and they would have been backed by other strong anti-revolutionary forces.

Austria-Hungary, too, would have been in a position at this juncture to send us troops, but the Empress Zita for political reasons always opposed all requests to this effect made by the Supreme Command. The Empress, who was a Bourbon, and in her heart was always in favour of France, was the real ruler of Austria—not the Emperor Karl. Despite the repeated promises of the Emperor to send us Austrian troops for the great offensive, she adroitly managed to frustrate any move to assist us. She would not even consent to the manning of quiet sectors of the Western Front with Austrian troops.

Dawn broke on March 21st. During the last few days violent rainstorms had been sweeping over the country. The Supreme Command were rather glad of this, as they hoped that the squally, cloudy weather conditions would



A NEW YEAR RECEPTION GIVEN BY PRESIDENT HINDENBURG
From a drawing by Schwormstedt



THE PRESIDENT WELCOMES KING AMANULLAH OF AFGHANISTAN TO BERLIN

help to conceal their final preparations from the enemy, and enable us to take him by surprise. During recent days the enemy's artillery had been surprisingly active. And with the aid of Very lights enemy 'planes picked out our most important connecting trenches and raked them with machine-gun fire. But after a while this fitful activity on the part of the enemy ebbed away, so that the Supreme Command still hoped to spring a surprise on him.

As day broke all Northern France, from the sea-coast to the Aisne, was buried under a thick blanket of fog. At times visibility was limited to a range of a few yards. The attack opened exactly to the scheduled minute. "Unseen, and themselves unable to see anything," runs a passage from Hindenburg's memoirs, "our artillerymen kept up a steady bombardment. It was solely on the accuracy of our preparations that we depended to make sure that we had got the range of the enemy trenches. The reply from the enemy batteries was fitful, and varied in intensity at different points of the battle line. It was more suggestive of a tentative searching for an unknown and unseen foe than of a systematic effort to beat off an attack. . . . The heavy bank of fog which covered everything showed no sign of lifting. And into that bank of fog our gallant infantry plunged at 11 a.m."

When towards noon the fog lifted and the sun shone forth triumphantly, it was seen that the Germans had succeeded in breaking through the enemy's front-line trenches. And our troops continued their victorious advance as the day wore on, but at a cost in men and war material that far exceeded our calculations. On subsequent days our men repeated the triumphs of the first day and paid an equally high price for them. And day by day the inadequacy of the reserves that were rushed up to fill up the yawning gaps in our divisions became more and more

evident. But there was no falling back on any part of the front for all that. On the second day the German centre had broken through the third lines of the enemy support trenches, while the left wing had pushed forward irresistibly towards the west. Only on the right wing, owing to the exceedingly tough fight put up by the English, was the German onset held up in front of the third line of trenches. The attempt to smash the English army on the Cambrai sector had failed.

On March 23rd, the German centre and right wing again pressed forward victoriously, and pushed southwards from Peronne across the Somme. And now German shells began to drop on Paris, and created a panic among the citizens. But this was merely a dramatic gesture, and meant very little as long as the third English line of defence held its ground. The Supreme Command pinned its hopes on a forward thrust to Amiens, that most important railway junction, the capture of which would divide the enemy's field operations in two, and would have developed the tactical "break through" into a strategic one. The great offensive swept ahead, and on the fourth day of the battle Bapaume fell into German hands. Peronne and the Somme now lay well to the rear of the foremost German divisions. The English lines were broken and fell back towards Amiens.

But our strength was exhausted. Reserves were not forthcoming, and so the right wing advance came to a standstill. The effort, too, to keep the battle going by an attack on the hilly region to the east of Arras failed. And although the German centre succeeded in capturing Albert, and the left wing pressed forward on the seventh day of the battle from the south past Roye to Montdidier, and although further territory was taken during subsequent days, Amiens still remained in possession of the enemy. The exhaustion of our troops made it imperative to cry halt.

The great battle was over without bringing in its train any decisive result.

The enemy had extremely heavy casualties and we took considerable numbers of prisoners as well as large quantities of war material, but although their losses were considerably heavier than ours they could make their losses good much more easily than we could, owing to the ample reserves in men and material which they could draw upon.

Critics of the Supreme Command's plan of attack contended that the battle zone was badly chosen, and that from a strategic point of view it was bound to prove abortive. The aim of the offensive was to drive a wedge between the English and the French. Had the Germans first defeated the English and driven them back to the Channel ports, the attack could have been directed along the Somme towards Amiens, the critics said. Instead of doing so, Ludendorff had opened the attack far too much towards the south, merely because the enemy were weaker there. In other words, because his forces were inadequate he did not make a thrust in the direction where it would have been most effective.

It is almost miraculous that the German March offensive was carried through at all, as the enemy had very detailed information regarding all the movements of our troops. They knew the exact day and hour when the attack was to open, and also the sector against which it was aimed. This was, of course, due to the excellent system of espionage of the French.

As far back as February of that year Foch had made the following statement at the French Army Headquarters :

“Ludendorff will make his main attack either to the west or the south of the centre point of our forward wings ; that is to say, either against the British in the

direction of Cambrai, or against the French in the direction of Rheims. If he succeeds in smashing through either of those sectors, his own flank will be exposed. The greater his success, the deeper will be his forward wing, and the longer and more unprotected his flank as a result. Consequently I shall divide our reserves into three unequal parts, the smallest of which I shall post in Dauphine close to the best route towards Italy ; I shall concentrate the largest in the vicinity of Paris and the third near Amiens. Judging by the way Ludendorff has massed his troops, the attack will be either at Rheims or Cambrai. Our main reserves are near Paris, so that they can easily be hurried to give support on either sector. The Amiens reserves shall cover the rear of the Fifth British Army, the weakest spot on our front."

Foch had always laughed at what he termed the " buffalo strategy " of Ludendorff, and now partly through intuition, partly through information received from German deserters, and partly too through reports which he received from his spies in Switzerland and Denmark, he had guessed Ludendorff's plan, with the result that the " buffalo " ran into the trap set for him. But Foch could not carry out his counter-manœuvres, as owing to the opposition offered by Haig to the decision of the Allied Command, the timely mustering of their common reserves was prevented. Were it not for Haig's stubbornness the victory of our troops at Amiens would probably have proved disastrous to us. Indeed the remark which Marshal Foch made on the last day of the Battle of the Marne, when the Germans made the seventh attack at Mondement, might very well be applied to the great March offensive too : " Now, gentleman, the Germans across the way must be in a tight fix somewhere as they are in such a desperate hurry."

In the beginning of the battle the confusion on the side of our enemies was very great, far greater than the Germans suspected. There were rather heated interchanges between Foch and Haig. The English threatened to fall back towards the sea-coast if French reinforcements did not arrive as quickly as possible. A gap nearly nine and a half wide miles yawned between the enemy sectors. The aim of the German Supreme Command, to wit, the separation of the French and English armies, had actually been attained. But the German commanders were not aware of the existence of this splendid opening ; and, indeed, even if they had been aware of it, they had no longer adequate reserves to effect a "break through" and roll up the English front. They had neither cavalry divisions nor tanks to dash through the gap. The German storm troops were utterly exhausted. The columns could not advance any further, as the half-starving horses were hardly able to stagger along through the knee-deep miry ground. There was a terrible shortage both of food and munitions. In some sections of the battle-front the batteries and battalions had run out of ammunition altogether. And all the time there was Amiens, the key-point of the enemy front, so near them, and yet now so utterly unattainable. The Supreme Command had over-estimated their strength ; they had not calculated on the enormous difficulties in the way of bringing up food and ammunition along the impassable regions of the Battle of the Somme.

On the other hand, various unforeseen circumstances arrested us in our advance. Disputes between the French and English commanders prevented the bringing up of reserves to the place where the German "break through" occurred. And then when at a supremely critical moment General Foch was entrusted by a hurriedly summoned Council of War with supreme command over all the forces

of the Allies, the Germans had once again missed the tide of victory.

At this supreme crisis General Foch, heedless of the fact that there was a considerable gap at another sector of the front, transferred three divisions from the French lines to the neighbourhood of Amiens. The gap was closed and the German attack was held up about a quarter of a mile away from Amiens. To quote the words of an English General : " The German troops collapsed right in front of Amiens, worn out by fatigue and hunger." And so once more both sides dug themselves into trenches, and the static war of attrition, from which Hindenburg hoped to rescue his troops, started anew on this sector. Owing to the deep bulge in the German lines caused by their penetrating far into the enemy front, their position was eventually more precarious than ever.

As the " break through " had proved abortive, Hindenburg and Ludendorff decided to switch off their attack to another sector of the front. Henceforth, however, they were not intent on a great decisive break-through, which would paralyse the enemy once and for all ; they had decided to confine themselves to the delivery of sledge-hammer thrusts at various parts of the front, in the hope of gradually wearing down the enemy's powers of resistance in this way. The question was whether they could stand the waste of man-power and war material which this policy involved.

On February 13th, Ludendorff had told the Kaiser that it was not to be expected that the plan of attack on the Western Front could visualise an offensive on the lines of those which had been carried out in Galicia or in Italy. They must rather be prepared for a terrific battle which would start on one sector, and then switch on to another, with the result that it might be a long time before a decisive result was attained. But it was exactly in this calculation

that the Supreme Command made a great mistake. Owing to the courage and dash of the German troops it was of course possible to score tactical victories on one sector or another and to inflict heavy losses on the enemy, but the great decision on the Western Front could not be attained by sectional triumphs. The ebbing of this first great onset showed plainly how difficult it was to follow up even such a spectacular initial success, and that all hopes of breaking through the enemy lines must henceforth be abandoned. Owing to the impossibility of bringing up German reserves quickly, the enemy gained sufficient time to bring up their own reserves and to put up a fresh resistance in rearward positions. The winning of a few miles of ground really meant nothing for us.

An offensive against Italy, which was suggested by the Austro-Hungarian military authorities with a view to routing the hard-set Italian army and finishing the fight on that front, was turned down as, in Ludendorff's view, the decision could only be made on the Western Front.

The next drive was made against the English positions in Flanders. On April 9th German divisions dashed forward from their muddy trenches on the Lys sector near Armentières between Warneton and La Bassée along a 25-mile front towards the direction of the English Channel. It was only with the greatest difficulty that they could make headway through ground which was churned up by shells and mines. The enemy had not calculated on an attack on this sector so early in the year, and was taken completely by surprise. In spite of the tremendous difficulties of the ground the German infantry, supported by our own artillery and mine-throwers, overcame the resistance of the English and Portuguese in their headlong onset. Once again the muddy fields of Flanders claimed a heavy toll of victims. Once again the names of Hazebrouck, Cassel, Ypres and Kemmel were on everybody's

lips. The Lys was reached in the evening, and at one spot it was even crossed. But the greatest difficulty was experienced in bringing up the artillery as well as the ammunition waggons for the infantry.

The troops had fought splendidly, and the confidence of the Supreme Command in the *morale* of the army revived. On April 10th Estaires was taken, and the attack was pushed forward towards the vicinity of Wytschaete. Everywhere the English fell back before their onset. Also on the following day there were further successes. Armentières was evacuated by the enemy, and Merville was taken by storm. From the south the Fourth and Sixth Armies advanced towards the hilly land which bounded the plain of the Lys towards the north, and which stretched from the strongly held Kemmel Hill towards Cassel. From the summit of Kemmel Hill the enemy artillery dominated the battle zone. From hour to hour it became more and more difficult to push forward. The English resistance had now become more and more dogged, and machine-gun nests wreaked terrible havoc on our advancing infantry. It was only after desperate fighting that scraps of ground could be wrested from the enemy. "We had reached one of those crises of the war when it was extremely difficult to attack, while defensive tactics were risky," wrote Hindenburg. "Our only way out of our perilous plight was to push ahead doggedly."

Kemmel Hill had to be stormed. Hindenburg realised that once it was in our possession, the enemy would no longer be able to hold their positions to the north of it on the Yser. In order to prevent the French from hastening to the assistance of the hard-pressed English forces, a new offensive, aimed at Amiens, was opened near Villers-Bretonneux. This was the last drive of the great spring offensive, and it proved abortive, as far as taking Amiens was concerned. However, it had attained its main

objective, which was to keep the French too busy to help their allies. The fight for the possession of Amiens ceased on April 26th.

On April 25th Kemmel Hill was attacked. The German troops dashed forward recklessly and drove the English from their strongly entrenched positions, and by evening Kemmel Hill was once more in the hands of the Germans.

The occupation of this important point of support crippled the enemy on the Flanders front. The enemy had begun to fall back slowly from the Ypres sector, when at the last minute French reinforcements turned up. And by this time the German troops, who had been decimated by the uninterrupted fighting, were quite played out. The fury of their attack ebbed more and more, and died away at the end of April in front of the Anglo-French lines. The Supreme Command were forced to revert to defensive tactics in Flanders on May 1st, mainly owing to the fact that in the fighting along the Lys area several divisions had lost their *morale*. There were even instances of a flat refusal to obey orders. In his memoirs Ludendorff complained bitterly that the abolition by the Reichstag, in the earlier years of the war, of the more brutal forms of field punishment for breaches of military discipline, had reacted very adversely on the men. The Entente Powers, he said, had not restricted the powers of their generals in this respect, with the result that they had more control over their soldiers.

Despite the terrible casualties that it involved, the fight at Armentières, though a spectacular sectional success, had failed in its objective—the hurling back of the English to the sea. With bulldog tenacity the British forces held on to Ypres and their new positions, with the result that the Flanders front settled down once more into a condition of stalemate. How firmly Hindenburg had fixed his hopes

on success in this sector may be inferred from the following extract from his memoirs :

“The final decision of the war, in my view, was contingent on the success of this attack. If we reached the shores of the English Channel, we would have had England by the throat immediately. We would not only have been in the most favourable position for challenging her sea outlets, but we could bombard a portion of the south coast of England.”

In the hope of deflecting the enemy forces from the Flanders front, now again firmly entrenched and amply fortified with reserves of men and munitions, a new attack was opened along Chemin-des-dames and that river, so fatal to Germany's hopes, the Marne. After prolonged discussions, the Kaiser approved of the following plan of the Supreme Command for their attack :

1. An attack by the Seventh and First Armies from and Anizy line, to the south-west of Laon, and south of Berry-au-Bac in the direction of Soissons-Fismes-Rheims.
2. An extension of the attack across the Ailette towards the Oise and towards the left in the direction of Rheims.
3. An attack by the Eighth Army to the west of the Oise, concentrating in the direction of Compiègne.

A simultaneous attack on such an extended front was, however, impossible, as some of the guns, which had been brought up for the “great offensive,” had to be allotted for the defence of Prince Rupprecht's army group, which had received instructions to remain provisionally on the defensive, but to be in readiness for a new offensive.

On May 27th the battle opened, and once more it had a dramatic initial success. On the very first day the

Germans succeeded in hurling back the enemy who was taken completely by surprise, as far as the Vesle, and by the third day they had overrun Soissons and Fismes. In a few days the Seventh Army had advanced from Château-Thierry as far as Dormans on the Marne, so that their wings could swing westwards towards Villers-Cotterets and eastwards towards Rheims. We acquired an enormous amount of booty, and 560,000 French prisoners of war were despatched to Germany. The war material captured from the enemy included 878 pieces of artillery and 2500 machine-guns. Our men could see the silhouette of the Eiffel Tower outlined against the skyline. Once again Paris was bombarded by our long-range guns. The German soldiers were standing among the graves of their comrades who had fallen four years previously in this district. They were all aware that victory was within sight in 1914 when the triumphant advance of the German forces was suddenly stopped and the fatal order to retreat was given. And now for the second time Germany's fatal hour on the Marne had struck.

The powerful German "pincers" could open out on both sides of Montdidier and Château-Thierry, and then close on the entire enemy forces entrusted with the defence of Paris. Two salients in the zone of battle, Rheims and the defensive positions at Compiègne and Villers-Cotterets, had still held out, however, with the result that the German forces were once more in a perilous plight on the Marne sector. Nobody could tell what hidden dangers lurked in the dense woods of Villers-Cotterets. At any moment it was possible that an enemy army might emerge from those woods and attack the right flank of the German troops on the Marne. To relieve the menace to the German right wing an attack was delivered against Compiègne. It failed, but the mystery of Villers-Cotterets was still unsolved.

With a view to drawing off further reserves from the English front preparatory to delivering a knock-out blow on the Flanders sector, Ludendorff decided once more to make another drive on both sides of Rheims. Owing to information given to the enemy by spies, this attack proved abortive. Even before the German drum-fire had commenced, the enemy had evacuated his front lines, and waited for the onset of the German infantry in his rear trenches which had not been bombarded at all by our artillery. The German losses were appalling. The Supreme Command were at a loss even to guess how their plans had been revealed to the enemy. Once more the French espionage system in Germany had proved its efficiency, and had obviously revealed to Marshal Foch full details about the plan of attack on Rheims. And German deserters had confirmed the information which he had already got from the spies.

After this heavy blow Ludendorff stopped the battle on the Marne and gave instructions for immediate preparations for the main offensive in Flanders. He transferred all available troops to the neighbourhood of Lille, and went to that sector himself in order to discuss tactical details of the offensive. He was determined at all costs to push ahead to the sea.

But Foch stole a march on Ludendorff. With the greatest secrecy he had marshalled strong reserves at Villers-Cotterets, and in the early hours of that fatal day, which proved the turning-point of the war, 321 tanks advanced under the joint cover of fog and gas-clouds, from the wood at Villers-Cotterets. The German positions were overrun at their very first onset. The soldiers were utterly helpless against the advance of these steel monsters. They fell back, and their retreat quickly changed into helter-skelter flight. The tanks followed so hot on the heels of the fugitives that they had not an opportunity

of rallying. And still more and more tanks, hidden by the dense banks of natural and artificial fog, rolled onward from the wood. The German artillery was helpless. To make matters worse, the high corn combined with the fog to make it impossible to cope with the menace. After a few hours all the German artillery on this sector was in the hands of the French. "Brass hats," overtaken by the tanks, had to shin it for dear life from their billets. The ammunition columns and the stretcher-bearers, though they were far behind the German positions, were very soon overtaken by the onset of the tanks. There were no German reserves available, and the few battalions that were rushed up in motor-lorries were unable to stem the tide of disaster.

Ludendorff heard the appalling news in the forenoon while he was holding a conference with Prince Rupprecht's army group regarding the plans for the great attack in Flanders. He reached Avesnes about 2 p m., where he was met by Hindenburg at the railway-station. The troops destined for Flanders were immediately rushed to the threatened sector.

On the following day Foch attacked. His onset covered the entire German front on the Marne. If the French succeeded in pushing ahead between the Aisne and the Marne, the Seventh and Ninth Armies would have been done for. The Ninth Army had to protect the rear and flank of the Seventh Army. The retreat towards the north took several days, and gradually the German resistance stiffened again. The Seventh Army stood once more behind the Aisne. On July 22nd there was a lull in the fight. The worst had been avoided, but the enemy had finally adopted the initiative. There was no longer any hope of going on with the Flanders offensive. With heavy heart Hindenburg decided to give up any further ideas of attacking the enemy on any front for the present.

The German army had performed tremendous feats during the recent fighting, but the casualties were so heavy that it was impossible to fill the gaps caused by them. In a few weeks the strength of the fighting forces had shrunk so alarmingly that several regiments and divisions had to be disbanded, as it was impossible to fill their depleted ranks. Artillery brigades had dwindled in the course of a few days from 600 to 80 guns. Several front-line divisions, instead of having 1000 guns, had scarcely 300. On an average a division needed a reserve of 40,000 men per month. The Supreme Command roughly calculated on an average a loss of 200,000 men per month, but at this stage of the war the authorities could only muster 120,000 reserves, and it took extraordinary efforts to reach even this figure.

Since the putting into operation of the Hindenburg programme, the supplies of war material, at least as far as guns and rifles were concerned, might, taken all round, be described as satisfactory. Sometimes the supplies even exceeded the requirements of the Hindenburg programme. At the outset Hindenburg had asked for a monthly delivery of 3000 new field-guns. After a while, however, that number was reduced to 750. In the spring of 1917 it was found that the supplies of rifles and machine-guns exceeded the demand. The Western Front needed on an average 570,000 rifles and 6000 machine-guns per month. But in reality three times this amount was manufactured, so that a substantial reduction of their production was ordered. On the other hand the shortage of means of transport was extremely serious. There was a shortage of lorries and other motor-vehicles as well as of aircraft. Worst of all, there was a great shortage of petrol.

It was a very serious drawback that the German army had no tanks. The effectiveness of these terrible weapons of war was unduly underrated by the Supreme Command.

When they did eventually realise the effectiveness of the tank, it was already far too late. The miscalculation made by the Supreme Command with regard to the tank was analagous to that made by Tirpitz in underrating the importance of the submarine campaign. Had we an adequate supply of tanks at our disposal it is extremely probable that the history of the last year of the World War would have taken a different course. Competent military critics definitely express it as their conviction that the great offensive in the spring of 1918 would have been successful had the Supreme Command had at its disposal an adequate fleet of tanks.

After the close of the year 1917 the German drum-fire became increasingly less and less effective. The enemy had developed a trick of not waiting until his front-line positions had been subjected to a heavy and prolonged bombardment. Instead of doing so, he moved in the nick of time to his rearward trenches. During the course of the great attack at Rheims the German storm troops charged utterly deserted trenches, which had been evacuated by the enemy at the first rumble of the drum-fire, or even before the first rumble frequently as the result of timely warning supplied by French spies and German deserters.

In his memoirs Ludendorff tried to belittle the effectiveness and the military importance of the tank, as his comment on their appearance at Villers-Cotterets shows : " On this occasion, for the first time, small, low, quick-moving tanks whose machine-guns played on our troops across the cornfields, were in operation. Thus they were able to put our machine-guns out of action, save when the latter were hidden in special strategic posts. But on this occasion, too, the effectiveness of the tank was negligible."

The German officers and men who could tell from their own dreadful experiences of the overwhelming efficiency of the tank, will hardly endorse Ludendorff's view.

CHAPTER XII

PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

THE weakness of the German front could not be concealed from the enemy any longer. Everywhere he had changed from defensive to offensive tactics. In Flanders, where the Supreme Command hoped a few weeks previously to bring about the battle which would finish the war, an enemy offensive with overwhelming forces hurled back the German lines. And so it was decided to reorganise our entire front on a defensive basis. The bulges on the front line which we had secured by our attacks in the spring and summer had to be sacrificed. Only one idea—the fortifying of our positions—now obsessed the Supreme Command. But not until the fear of a “break through” by the enemy was past did the Supreme Command decide to speak candidly to the Chancellor of the Reich about the necessity of foregoing the war aims which so far we had stubbornly insisted upon, with a view to opening the way for negotiations for a peace by agreement. Such a peace by agreement was the best we could hope for now, as the military authorities had at length recognised too !

The spirit of the once so proud and valiant German army was now utterly broken. The exhausted troops were no longer able to undertake any large-scale defensive operations. August 8th, “the German Army’s black day in the history of the war,” proved with startling clearness that our army was no longer able to hold up a determined

enemy offensive—to say nothing of initiating an offensive itself. Without any preliminary artillery barrage the English, accompanied by Australian and Canadian divisions, and supported by the French, attacked on a twenty-mile front between Albert and Moreuil under cover of a dense bank of fog. They were not much superior in numbers to our forces, but they were backed by huge fleets of tanks. In a few minutes they overran the German lines, and once more caused widespread confusion and panic. On this occasion “brass hats” were again taken by surprise at their headquarters as these fire-breathing steel brutes, reminiscent of antediluvian mammoths, forged ahead. The blanket of fog overhanging everything made it impossible to try to cope with these monsters with artillery.

Two hours after the beginning of the offensive, English tanks and strong cavalry divisions had penetrated nine miles behind the German front. The gap through which the enemy penetrated broadened and extended past the River Luce. The German lines that still held their ground at Moreuil were quickly rolled up.

“I had a full view of the dreadful scene early in the afternoon of August 8th,” writes Ludendorff in his memoirs. “It was a very heart-breaking sight. . . . Six or seven German divisions were completely broken up. Three or four intact divisions, supported by the remnants of the broken divisions, were in readiness to fill up the yawning gap between Bray and Roye. The position was extremely serious. Had the enemy at that critical moment followed up their initial advantage by a fairly determined attack on our position west of the Somme, it would have been no longer tenable.”

It was lucky for us that the English did not make an effort to follow up their victory. Our reserves which were

brought up with the greatest possible speed from other sectors of the front, brought the attack at last to a standstill. Our front had been saved, but our losses were terrible. The enemy took 26,000 prisoners and captured 400 guns. But a more tragic indication of things was the utter collapse of the fighting spirit of several German divisions. Overcome with utter war-weariness, the soldiers surrendered without even making any attempt at a serious resistance. And this last trial of strength had made our position, relative to that of the enemy, infinitely worse than it had been before. The more American troops now joined in the fight the more heavily did the scales tip in favour of our opponents. There was no longer any hope that we could substantially improve our position by an attack. The best we could hope for now was that we would be able to hold out against the enemy. But the enemy also was now fully aware that the German army had lost its old spirit, that it could no longer make good its losses with reserves from the recruiting depots at home and from the other fronts. At any moment we had to reckon with the possibility of new offensives by the enemy.

In view of this situation all we could do was to fall back, as soon as the enemy made a vigorous drive against our front, and to prevent him from breaking through by rushing up all our reserves to any menaced sector. Hindenburg and Ludendorff saw that the time had come when they must talk seriously with the Kaiser about the turn which things had taken. On August 13th there was a conference in Hindenburg's suite at the Hotel Britannique in Spa between himself, Ludendorff, the Chancellor of the Reich, and Admiral von Hintze, the Secretary of State. At this conference Ludendorff gave a report of the war position, of the attitude of the army and of our relations with our allies. He pointed out that there was no longer any prospect of making the enemy inclined to negotiate



MAKING FRIENDS WITH THE PRESIDENT



A DAY OF NATIONAL MOURNING. PRESIDENT VON HINDENBURG
LEAVING THE REICHSTAG

for peace through the medium of an offensive, and that there was scarcely any chance of making him come to an understanding by assuming the defensive ; consequently the only thing to be done was to bring about the end of the war by diplomatic means. For the present the Western Front could hold out against the enemy, but in view of the war-weariness which had permeated some of our divisions, a falling-back of the front line had to be counted upon.

Hindenburg adopted a more optimistic tone. He pointed out that it must be remembered that we still held our position deep in the heart of the enemy's country ; consequently conditions were far from desperate. Despite individual distressing incidents, he went on, the *morale* of the soldiers was, on the whole, very good. He knew the heroism of the front-line soldiers, and believed that they would stick it out until there was a prospect of initiating peace negotiations on favourable terms. He had still, he declared, absolute faith in the powers of resistance of the troops.

“ In adopting this attitude,” stated Hindenburg in his memoirs, “ I was not exclusively actuated by my desire to vindicate the heroism of our troops. Our army had so thoroughly proved its heroism during the four years of the war, that, come what might, I knew that our enemies could never deprive us of that glorious heritage. I was solely actuated in expressing my views and advancing my proposals through consideration for the welfare of the Fatherland. I felt convinced that even if we could not force the enemy, as the result of a victory on the battlefield, to come to terms with us which would ensure once and for all the security of our German Fatherland, we could at least wear down our enemy. And if we succeeded in doing so, we would probably even then be able to secure fairly good terms for our country.”

On August 14th, the Kaiser summoned the various responsible Cabinet Ministers to an Imperial Council, which the Crown Prince also attended. Both Hindenburg and Ludendorff expressed the same views as on the previous day. They stated that despite the terrible blows which the German army had suffered, the Western Front could be held, but, nevertheless, it seemed advisable to initiate negotiations for peace. His voice broken with emotion, and his eyes dimmed with tears, Admiral von Hintze, the Secretary of State, made a statement about the military and political situation. He said that the great successes of the Entente forces during recent weeks had considerably enhanced their fighting spirit. Their aim was the utter annihilation of Germany. An unpleasant development of the international situation, he said, was the fact that the neutral states, which hitherto had adopted a noncommittal attitude, now sided openly with the Entente. Austria, he pointed out, was incapable of putting up anything like a serious resistance, and she would immediately collapse under the strain of an Italian offensive. For these reasons he considered it advisable to set the machinery of diplomacy going at the earliest possible moment.

The Crown Prince, too, strongly advocated immediate peace negotiations. The Kaiser, who retained absolute composure during the course of the proceedings, gave instructions to the Secretary of State to make overtures for peace "at the opportune moment, and as far as possible through the medium of the Queen of Holland." And so this momentous Imperial Council came to an end.

A few days later the Emperor Karl and Herr Burian, his Minister for Foreign Affairs, the successor of Count Czernin, arrived. They both emphasised the view that Austria could not fight any longer, and would be obliged to ask the enemy to make peace with her. Hindenburg pointed out very quietly to them that it was a mistake to

assume that an individual state could secure any substantial advantage for itself by making an offer of a separate peace. The only result of such a move would be that their common cause would be considerably weakened. No member state of the Quadruple Alliance could sever its connection in such a manner with the other member states.

As a matter of fact the efforts of Austria-Hungary to come to terms in the middle of September with the Entente proved absolutely abortive. The Entente just curtly refused to discuss the issue.

The effort to hold the front in case the enemy might launch further great offensives before negotiations for peace were under way caused great anxiety to the Supreme Command. It was decided that new rear positions must be constructed immediately. The defensive positions that they possessed were not sufficiently strongly constructed to ward off an attack effectively. The Supreme Command contemplated constructing a new line behind the Meuse, stretching from Antwerp to Verdun, but there was not an adequate number of men available to fortify the projected position.

The German front had barely begun to consolidate its position when the French advanced to make a new great offensive between the Oise and the Aisne in the direction of Chauny. The attack opened on August 20th, exactly six days after the meeting of the Imperial Council, at which Hindenburg had expressed his great confidence in the spirit and *morale* of our soldiers. Once more the German army had to face a very critical situation. Whole divisions broke down. The positions of the Ninth Army were overrun at many points. The enemy also advanced against Nouvion, but here they got a rather fierce reception at the hands of the Germans.

Towards evening the position had become so menacing that the Supreme Command found it essential to withdraw

under cover of night the right wing of the Ninth Army to the rear of the Oise. On the following night the centre fell back across the Ailette. Practically all the German artillery on this sector of the front fell into the hands of the enemy. "The battle had again taken an unfavourable turn," runs a passage from Ludendorff's memoirs. "Our soldiers' nerves had become so utterly shattered that they were no longer able to withstand the terrible artillery bombardment and the onset of the tanks. And once more we suffered terrible casualties—casualties which created gaps for which no reserves were available."

On August 21st the English succeeded in extending the front they held on August 8th to the north-west of Bapaume. Very fierce engagements ensued all along the extensive sector between Rheims and the Scarpe. On August 26th the English offensive along the Arras-Cambrai road began. For a while the German troops withstood the onset, but on September 2nd, a fleet of tanks charged through the fortifications and trenches of the Wotan position, and cleared the way for the infantry that followed in their wake. This meant the evacuation of the German positions at Arras. With heavy hearts the Supreme Command decided to order the entire front line to fall back from the Vesle to the Scarpe. On September 9th the Germans were once more in the Siegfried position, from which they had advanced half a year previously for the great offensive. By this manœuvre they had shortened the length of their front line. In order to ensure a further economy of their available man-power they evacuated the salients to the north of the Lys which jutted out past Kemmel Hill and Merville. This withdrawal considerably eased the position of our troops, while the enemy experienced the greatest difficulty in advancing through the churned-up ground which we had evacuated. But even in their old, well-constructed positions, to which they had fallen back, the

Germans could not maintain an effective resistance for an indefinite period.

After a conference with the chief of the army group on that sector, the Supreme Command issued an order for the construction of the Hermann position, which was to extend to the rear of the two northern army groups from the Dutch frontier east of Bruges towards the south-west of Marle, where it was to link up with the Hunding-Brünhild position which had been constructed in 1917.

But in the meantime things began to get a bit lively on the Verdun front which had been absolutely quiet for a long time. On this sector we still held the positions in which our attacks in 1914 had settled down into a state of stalemate. "It was a tactical blunder" runs a passage from Hindenburg's memoirs, "which might easily invite the enemy to make a great offensive at this point."

If the enemy succeeded at this critical moment in effecting a break-through at the base of the triangle which drove forward deep into his lines, a catastrophe would have been unavoidable. In consideration of this imminent menace and of the extraordinary activity against the sector held by the von Gallwitz Army Group between St. Mihiel and the Moselle, the Supreme Command gave orders on September 10th—unfortunately too late—for the evacuation of St. Mihiel salient. But while our troops were actually engaged in the process of evacuating St. Mihiel, the attack by the American and French troops on that sector commenced. In their first onset they swept over the German position, and captured 100 guns and 15,000 prisoners. Luckily the enemy did not follow up his victory fully, and the offensive soon came to a standstill in consequence. So far, despite the terrible sacrifices which he suffered, the enemy had not succeeded in effecting a break-through at any point on the Western Front.

But now a series of reports of disaster on other theatres

of war came pouring in. The bulletins from Bulgaria were so ominous that the Supreme Command decided to despatch a number of German battalions to Macedonia. Early in Spring the Bulgarian soldiers had declared that they would not continue the fight after September 15th, the anniversary of their mobilisation. Entente and American gold was secretly circulated in Sofia for the purpose of undermining the *morale* of the Bulgarian army. It was a singular and an ominous coincidence in dates that on September 15th, the anniversary of the Bulgarian mobilisation, news reached the General Supreme Headquarters that the Entente armies had opened an offensive in Macedonia. Hindenburg hoped, however, that after their prolonged spell of quiet, the Bulgarian soldiers on the Macedonian frontier would be quite fresh and eager for battle. If they showed a fighting spirit, they could put up a very stout resistance in those pathless mountain regions, even with slender forces. But the Bulgarians did not make the faintest show of resistance to the advancing enemy. The position was utterly hopeless. Bulgaria's doom was sealed on that fatal September 15th.

The only exception to the wholesale collapse of the Bulgarian resistance was furnished by the troops on the front between the Wardar and the Doivancee, who stubbornly contested every foot of the ground against the attack of the English. The German generals made a desperate effort by throwing their utterly inadequate forces into the fight to save the centre of the Bulgarian army. But their efforts were all in vain. Bulgarian regiments to a man refused to fight, and fell back before the English offensive. The Bulgarians volunteered to help the Germans to haul their guns along the appalling roads, but stubbornly refused to tackle the enemy. On September 20th the Commander of the German Army Group had no alternative to ordering the right wing and the centre

of the Bulgarian army to fall back, in order to save their entire forces from being taken prisoners. On September 29th the right wing of the Bulgarian army surrendered to a small Serbian force at Kalkandelen. On the evening of the same day Bulgaria asked for, and was granted, an armistice.

The Turkish resistance in Palestine also crumbled up as the result of a British offensive between Jaffa and Haifa. The Turkish army fell back in utter disorder past Damascus and Aleppo. The Mesopotamian front, having been cut from its bases of supplies by this headlong flight, collapsed without a blow. On October 30 an armistice was signed at Mudros between Turkey and the conquerors. Only Germany and Austria-Hungary still stood out.

The position became more and more acute from day to day on the Western Front. Towards the end of September Foch made a great concerted offensive on a front stretching from the Meuse to the North Sea. The Germans had to fall back all along their front to prevent a "break through." On September 28th disaster appeared to be so utterly inevitable that Hindenburg and Ludendorff decided to offer to open peace negotiations with the enemy on the basis of the "fourteen points" outlined by President Wilson in the beginning of the year 1918. They felt that any day utter defeat, swift and irremediable, might come.

Immediately after returning from the Imperial Council at Spa, the Chancellor of the Reich had informed the leaders of the various parties in the Reichstag about the seriousness of the position. He explained the fact, however, that, in the view of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, there was no imminent danger of collapse of the Western Front, and that the army was still capable of keeping back the enemy from the frontiers of Germany. Consequently, as a result of the Chancellor's reassuring words, none of the

leaders of the Reichstag parties had the faintest idea of the imminence of disaster. But now the deputies could not realise, when they received the Supreme Command's S.O.S. for an armistice, how the position at the front could have become so desperate in such a short space of time. They found themselves suddenly standing on the verge of a precipice. Then came a spate of violent attacks on Hindenburg and Ludendorff. They were bitterly accused of not having told the plain truth about the hopeless plight of the army. Their decision not to mince matters any longer, it was contended, was now rather belated.

A long time previously Matthias Erzberger, the leader of the Centre, had fiercely denounced the weak-kneed attitude of Herr Hertling, the Chancellor of the Reich, and accused him of being a mere tool of the Supreme Command. Now the leaders of the Social Democrats insisted that the military position should be discussed in the Reichstag. The Centre supported this demand. "The will of the Reichstag must be asserted against all obstacles," declared Deputy Groner, of the Centre.

On September 27th, Admiral von Hintze, the Secretary of State, called a meeting of the Party leaders, and informed them that the position had become pretty desperate, owing to the collapse of Bulgaria. Almost immediately there was a unanimous demand that Count Hertling should be dismissed, and that a "strong man" should be appointed as Chancellor of the Reich. After the meeting Admiral von Hintze hurried to Army Headquarters to report developments to the Kaiser. He found that even a more serious view of the military situation than he had expected had developed at the Supreme Command. Ludendorff had completely lost his head. He insisted that an appeal for an armistice should be made right away to the enemy who was preparing to advance to the attack,

He flatly denied that he had adopted an absolutely different attitude at the meeting of the Imperial Council six weeks previously, and he angrily demanded what definite steps had been taken since that meeting by the Chancellor in order to bring about negotiations for peace. The Chancellor expressed his regret that so far his efforts to initiate peace proceedings had secured no tangible results.

"That means that nothing has really been done," roared Ludendorff, banging his fist on the table.

When Ludendorff's spate of frenzy had spent itself, Hindenburg in his turn emphatically declared that an immediate application must be made for peace negotiations. On September 29th, after a sleepless night spent in anxiously weighing up the military position, Hindenburg, accompanied by Ludendorf, called on the Kaiser to tell him that the collapse of the Western Front was imminent, and that the only way to save the army and the people from a terrible fate was to appeal at once to President Wilson. Ludendorff went a step further. He demanded that an armistice should be arranged within the next twenty-four hours. The Secretary of State asked for a delay of a few days, and pointed out that acquiescence with Ludendorff's demand would be tantamount to unconditional surrender. This would entail revolution in Germany, and the overthrow of the Imperial dynasty. He suggested that, to avoid worse happening, it would be advisable to transfer the control of the army to the people. With a heavy heart, but outwardly very calm, the Kaiser agreed with the proposal of the Secretary of State, and signed the document which deprived the Hohenzollerns for ever of the great power which they had enjoyed in the past.

On September 30th Count Hertling resigned, and it was decided to ask Prince Max of Baden, who was highly

respected and trusted by our enemies as well as by our own people, to become Chancellor of the Reich.

The Vice-Chancellor of the Reich received on October 1st the following urgent telegram from Hindenburg :

“ If I get a guarantee between seven and eight p.m. to-day that Prince Max of Baden will form a Government, I agree to a postponement until to-morrow. On the other hand, should there be any doubt whatsoever about the formation of the Government, I consider that the declaration should be despatched to-night to the foreign Governments.

VON HINDENBURG.”

Half an hour had hardly elapsed when a telegram was sent from Army Headquarters by Ludendorff in which he urged that the peace offer should be despatched at once, and that it would not do to wait for the formation of the new Government, which might postpone the issue.

The Secretary was in a quandary. A further message came from Ludendorff who was in a state of nervous trepidation. He declared that it was no longer possible to hold the line. Every hour he expected to hear the news of a “ break through.” Again and again he rang up the Berlin Government during the next few hours, to enquire whether they had yet despatched the peace offer. He begged them to send it at once. He warned them of the consequences if they did not send it, and he finished by threatening them that he would hold them responsible for those consequences. He declared that the troops were no longer to be depended upon. Another determined attack by the enemy would mean the utter rout of the army.

News of disaster also arrived just then from Austria.

The Dual Monarchy was disintegrating. The Italians hung menacingly on her frontiers.

On receipt of the news from Austria the Kaiser set out from Army Headquarters to Berlin. Hindenburg followed him in the evening. He was anxious to stand by the Kaiser during those terrible days in case he should need his assistance or advice. "I was not actuated in taking this step by political considerations," runs a passage from Hindenburg's memoirs. "I hoped that I would be able to combat pessimism and to restore confidence. I found, however, that the people were in too desperate a frame of mind, and that my efforts would prove abortive. But even at that time I felt quite confident that we were in a position, despite the weakness of our forces, to keep the enemy away from the frontiers of the Fatherland for months. . . . Of course, this was contingent on our southern and eastern frontiers not being menaced and on the people at home remaining staunch."

Ludendorff remained at headquarters in order to endeavour to avert for the time being the menaced collapse of the Western Front. His time was divided between his military duties and fierce denunciations of the Party leaders of the Reichstag who were squabbling about ministerial posts. The Cabinet had not been formed so far. Furthermore, the Party leaders could not agree as to the wording of the message to President Wilson, which the Supreme Command deemed so urgent. Drafts of the message were drawn up, altered, and then thrown into the waste-paper basket. While they were busily engaged in drafting an alternative message, Ludendorff kept demanding from Spa that it should be despatched at once. He added that he would not be responsible for keeping the front intact for another twenty-four hours. As soon as the enemy came to know about the weakness of the German front, he would attack, and all would be lost. He would accept no

responsibility for anything that might happen after October 3rd.

The demand that Prince Max of Baden should be appointed Chancellor of the Reich became more and more insistent. In a message to the Archduke of Baden the Kaiser asked him to induce the Prince to undertake the Chancellorship. On October 2nd the Kaiser presided over another Imperial Council, at which, in addition to Hindenburg, Prince Max was present. The Prince expressed the view that it was rather premature as yet to ask for an armistice. In his opinion the Supreme Command adopted a too pessimistic attitude towards the situation. He considered that it would be more advisable to withdraw the army to the line of the Meuse, and to put up a final stand there. The Kaiser, however, stubbornly stood by the opinion of the Supreme Command.

With a heavy heart Prince Max decided to accept the chancellorship, despite the fact that he did not agree with the Kaiser and the Supreme Command about the military situation. "The request for an armistice will be made at any rate," he said, "and as it is better that I should issue it than that anybody else should do so, there is just a chance that in my case it may be considered as a voluntary act, whereas if it came from anybody else it might be regarded as being prompted by sheer desperation owing to the hopeless plight of the army."

On October 3rd the new Parliamentary Government was formed. Prince Max made a final effort to secure a postponement of the request for an armistice. He asked for a delay of eight days in order to draft the peace terms, and insisted that the army should be able to hold the front for that length of time. But the Supreme Command replied that they disclaimed all responsibility for the consequences if he did so. Prince Max reluctantly gave way, and hurriedly drafted the text of the message to President

Wilson. In the early hours of October 4th this momentous message was despatched through Switzerland to the American President.

It ran thus :

“ The German Government requests the President of the United States of America to undertake the task of bringing about peace, to inform all the belligerent nations with regard to this request, and to invite them to send plenipotentiaries to undertake negotiations. The German Government accepts the programme laid down by the President of the United States of America in the message to Congress of January 8th, 1918, and in his later announcements, especially in his speech of September 27th, as a basis for the peace negotiations.

“ In order to avoid further bloodshed the German Government requests for the immediate establishment of a general armistice on land, on sea and in the air.

PRINCE MAX OF BADEN,
Chancellor of the Reich.”

The die was cast. The Supreme Command had admitted to the whole world that they had lost the war. The proclamation of this news caused dismay in Germany, while the Entente Press hailed it with jubilation. Hitherto the Government had very carefully withheld from the people any information about the seriousness of the state of affairs. But now the awful truth was suddenly revealed to all the people that torrents of blood had been shed in vain, and that we would have to endure many further sacrifices.

Meanwhile the German front was slowly falling back. But, despite all his efforts, Foch could not manage to break through the lines of the retreating army. “ The decline of the zest for fighting among our men,” runs an extract

from his memoirs, "developed *pari-passu* with the decline of the enemy's lust for attack." Wherever the rattle of a German machine-gun was heard now, nobody ventured to stick his head out. Isolated machine-gun nests frequently held up whole divisions.

The position was not at all desperate as it seemed to Hindenburg and Ludendorff in the early days of October. From day to day the German front became more and more secure. The spirits of the Supreme Command revived. Hindenburg had hoped that a wave of mass enthusiasm would develop which would impress our enemies and react favourably on the spirits of the men at the front. On October 24th he wrote the following letter to the Chancellor :

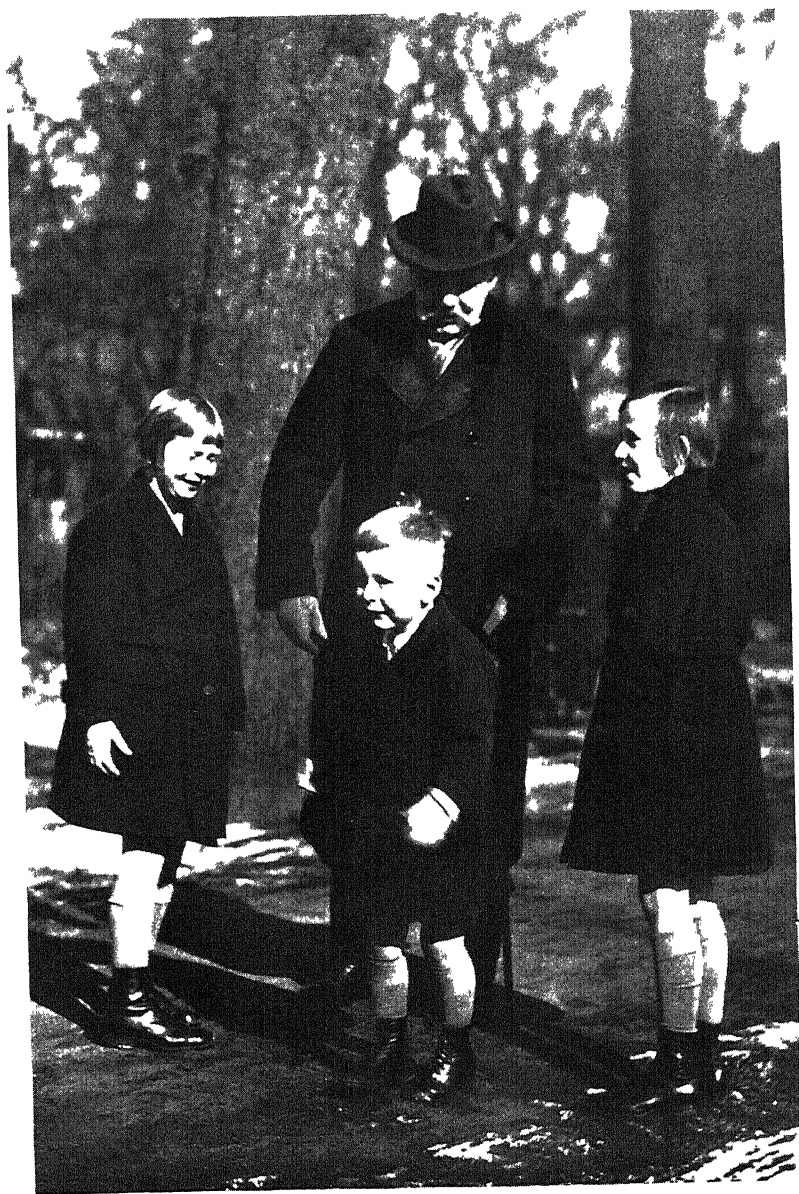
"Your Highness,

"I cannot deny that I was extremely pained to notice that among the recent speeches in the Reichstag there was not a warm appeal on behalf of the army.

"I had hoped that the new Government would enlist all the energy of all the people in the service of the defence of the Fatherland. On the contrary, with a few exceptions, the deputies spoke only about conciliating, instead of fighting the enemy who is menacing our Fatherland. Those speeches have had both a depressing and a demoralising effect on our soldiers. I have seen alarming indications of this disastrous effect.

"In order to carry on the task of national defence it is not merely men that the army requires ; it requires a feeling of conviction that it is fighting for our needs, and it requires spiritual inspiration for this noble task.

"Your Highness will agree with me that in view of the paramount importance of the moral support of the



A HAPPY PICTURE WITH HIS GRAND CHILDREN



HINDENBURG INAUGURATING THE THIRD REICH

people in the battlefield, in conducting the Government and in popular representation, it is essential to inspire and maintain this spirit among our people.

"I appeal earnestly to Your Highness as the head of the new Government to prove yourself equal to this holy task."

During the month of October telegrams kept passing to and fro between the German Government and President Wilson. Three days after the receipt of the Prince's first message the President asked him for information on several points.

After dealing first of all with the Prince's suggestion of considering the "fourteen points" as a basis of discussion, President Wilson asked whether the armies of the Central Powers would be immediately withdrawn from the occupied territories, and whether the Chancellor spoke on behalf of those powers which had up to then been waging war.

The Prince considered it essential to discuss the question of the withdrawal of the troops with Ludendorff, and requested him to come to Berlin. When Ludendorff appeared before the Prince on October 9th, he had completely recovered from the attack of nervous despondency from which he had suffered only a week previously. He once more felt himself quite able to cope with the military situation. He informed the Prince that he hoped by the Spring to have 600 tanks at his disposal.

As a basis for the conference the Prince placed an exhaustive questionnaire before Ludendorff.

"If the present peace negotiations break down, can the war be carried on by ourselves alone, if either one or both of the Allies whom we still have, withdraw from the fight?"

"Certainly," replied Ludendorff, "provided that there is a lull in the fight in the west."

In order to obtain an accurate idea of the military position, Prince Max was considering the idea of summoning a war council of the subordinate army commanders, with a view to having them questioned by Hindenburg as to their opinion regarding the situation. His suggestion was gruffly turned down by Ludendorff, who declared that the Kaiser alone, as Commander-in-Chief of the army, had the right to give orders for an enquiry regarding the views of the army leaders upon the military situation, while the Chancellor had no such right. Furthermore, the Supreme Command alone was competent to take a comprehensive view of the situation. Field-Marshal Hindenburg and himself were alone responsible on this score.

However, after a lot of arguing, an agreement was reached regarding the reply to be sent to President Wilson. Ludendorff accepted the preliminary condition demanded by President Wilson, dealing with the evacuation of the territories occupied by the Germans on the Western Front before an armistice could be granted. It was suggested that a commission composed of delegates from the various belligerent nations should discuss arrangements for the proposed evacuation.

President Wilson promptly replied that no arrangement could be accepted by the United States which did not provide absolutely satisfactory securities and guarantees for the maintenance of the present military superiority of the armies of the United States and of the Allies at the Front.

He added that in order to obviate any possibility of a misunderstanding, "it was essential to emphasise to the German Government the scope and definite purpose of one of the conditions of peace, which was embodied in the

address which he had delivered at Mount Vernon on July 4th, which contemplated the annihilation of any nation which deliberately aimed at the destruction of the peace of the world, or failing the annihilation of such an aggressive nation, its reduction to a state of practical impotence.

"The ruling power which has dominated the German nation so far, belongs to this category," President Wilson pointed out.

Wilson's note further demanded the complete surrender of Germany and the abdication of the Kaiser.

On receiving intimation about this note, Hindenburg and Ludendorff immediately hastened to Berlin. They angrily told the Kaiser that the army would not accept Wilson's terms, and was prepared to continue the fight. Ludendorff declared that under the leadership of Hindenburg the men would put up a stubborn resistance. As for himself, he would dictate the answer that was to be sent to Wilson. He added that if Prince Max of Baden would not submit to the will of the army he would have to resign.

Prince Max, however, was not a Count Hertling. He sternly forbade Ludendorff to meddle in political issues, for which he himself, as Chancellor, undertook full responsibility. He asked the Kaiser to dismiss Ludendorff, whereupon the latter offered to tender his resignation immediately, but withdrew it at the earnest request of Hindenburg.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff were now summoned to the Kaiser's presence. The Kaiser sternly reprimanded Ludendorff for the army order he had issued, rejecting Wilson's terms, which demanded complete surrender, and calling upon the troops to go into open revolt against the peace conditions and to continue the campaign.

The document in question, which was drafted by

Ludendorff, but was signed by Hindenburg, was as follows :

“ Notice to all troops,

“ Wilson says in his reply that he will propose to his allies to enter into negotiations for an armistice. He demands, however, that as a result of the armistice Germany must be reduced to such a state of helplessness in a military sense that she will never in the future be able to take up arms again. He would only be prepared to negotiate about a peace with Germany, if she submitted absolutely to the demands of the Allies with regard to her internal affairs, the alternative being her unconditional surrender.

“ Wilson’s reply demands the capitulation of our army. For this reason it is unacceptable to us soldiers. It is a proof that the determination to destroy us, which was the cause of the outbreak of war in 1914, is still deeply implanted in the hearts of our enemies. It is, furthermore, a proof that our enemies merely talk about ‘ a peace based on justice ’ in order to deceive us and to break down our power of resistance. Wilson’s answer, consequently, can only be an exhortation to us soldiers to continue our fight with all our might. When the enemy realise that, despite all their sacrifices, they will be unable to break through the German front, they will be prepared for a peace which will guarantee security for all classes of people in the Germany of the future.

“ In the Field,

“ October 24th, 10 p.m.

VON HINDENBURG.”

Now when it was too late, when Ludendorff’s precipitate demand for an armistice had revealed our helplessness and the impossibility of our continuing the war to the enemy,

Ludendorff had suddenly adopted this confident tone. The Kaiser, however, was opposed to any further futile bloodshed.

On October 26th Colonel von Haeften informed Ludendorff that at the request of the Government the Kaiser had dispensed with his services.

The Chancellor was confined to bed with a severe attack of influenza. The ministers assembled by his bedside and informed him about Ludendorff's dismissal. He immediately asked if Hindenburg, who in the past would never endure the idea of parting with Ludendorff, had also left the army. When he was told that Hindenburg was still at the head of the Supreme Command, he gave a sigh of relief.

"Everything will turn out all right, so long as Hindenburg sticks to his post."

Hindenburg found it very difficult to part from his faithful colleague and adviser with whom he had worked for so many years. How deeply he felt the loss of Ludendorff may be gleaned from the following extract from his memoirs :

"When on the following day I went again into the room in which we had worked together for so long, I felt as if, after burying a very dear friend, I had returned to my desolate home."

At Hindenburg's request the Kaiser now appointed General Gröner as Quarter-Master General. In foreign countries the dismissal of Ludendorff was regarded as the removal of the last obstacle in the way of peace.

But other victims were demanded. Immediately after Ludendorff had gone, the Social Democrats insisted on the abdication of the Kaiser. They pointed out that the position, both among the people and at the front, was becoming momentarily more and more menacing.

If the Kaiser abdicated the way would immediately be clear for the commencement of peace negotiations, they contended.

On October 29th the crew of the *Groszerkurfürst* mutinied. A rumour had been circulated that the German Navy was about to put to sea, in order to meet their doom in an open fight with the English. In the course of the next few days the mutiny spread among all the ships of the fleet. The officers were utterly unable to enforce discipline. Fires were extinguished in all the furnaces. The crews were determined to prevent the fleet being ordered out to fight and be needlessly sacrificed merely as a grandiose gesture just on the eve of the peace treaty.

On October 24th the Italian armies opened a general offensive upon the Austrian front, which met with a stubborn resistance at first, but very soon carried all before it. The break through at the Piave and at Vittorio Veneto culminated in a complete collapse of the Austrian front.

On October 26th the Kaiser received the following message from his ally :

“ It is my very painful duty to inform you that my people are neither capable nor willing to carry on the war any longer.

“ I have no right to oppose their will, as I have no longer any hope of a successful issue, for the attainment of which the moral and material essentials are lacking. Furthermore, I regard useless bloodshed as a crime which my conscience forbids me to permit.

“ If we do not bring the fight to an end immediately, a grave menace to our internal peace as well as to the monarchical principle is entailed.

“ Even my profound sense of my duty as your ally and a friend must be sacrificed to the consideration that

I must safeguard the interests of those States whose destinies God has entrusted in my keeping.

"And, therefore, I have to inform you that I have come to the unalterable decision to apply for a separate peace and an immediate armistice during the course of the next twenty-four hours.

"I cannot do otherwise. My conscience, which is my master, forces me to come to this decision.

"Your true friend,

"KARL."

On October 27th Austria-Hungary asked for a separate peace. On November 3rd the armistice of Padua was signed. After it had been signed the Italians won cheap laurels by rounding up 100,000 unarmed prisoners. Italian troops marched towards the South of Germany.

On November 4th the enemy opened a new general offensive on the Western Front. The German troops fell back slowly. At Verdun the German centre was threatened with a "break through," whereupon the Supreme Command issued instructions to fall back to the rear of the Meuse; the end was imminent. The powers of resistance of the troops were practically exhausted.

It was now absolutely essential to induce the Kaiser to abdicate, but nobody wished to undertake this unpleasant task. At length, however, the Prussian Minister of the Interior, Herr Drews, steeled himself to approach his monarch. He was met with a curt rebuff. The Kaiser added that he had no intention of deserting his army which, he said, needed him now "more than ever."

And while the Kaiser was stubbornly clinging to his tottering throne, the revolutionary movement in Germany, which had been financed with Russian money, was

gathering momentum. The red flag was flying from all the warships. Sailors marched in procession throughout the country, inciting the people to revolution. In the course of a few days soldiers' councils were instituted everywhere. The most important railway junctions were in the hands of the insurgents.

On November 7th, the revolution in Munich under Eisner's leadership broke out. The King of Bavaria abdicated. The revolution rolled on to Württemberg, where it met with similar success. But still the Kaiser, who had now gone to Army Headquarters at Spa, refused to abdicate. But Hindenburg and Gröner, after an anxious discussion on the crisis, came to the decision that there was no prospect of stemming the tide of revolt in Germany with the assistance of the army at the front. They knew that the troops would refuse to fight against their brothers. The Kaiser, on the other hand, contended stubbornly that the army would be ready to reconquer Germany under his leadership.

On the evening of November 8th a council was held at Army Headquarters by Hindenburg, at which Gröner and several generals of the Kaiser's retinue were present, to discuss the question of marching on Berlin. Both Hindenburg and Gröner insisted that considering the present mood of the troops, such a step would be disastrous. All the army group commanders and generals in the vicinity were hurriedly summoned to Spa to report on the attitude of the troops in their respective areas. Their evidence made it abundantly clear that it was necessary to impress upon the Kaiser the fact that he could no longer depend on the army.

Hindenburg decided that it would be better that the Kaiser should know exactly the views of the group-commanders and generals on the chances of a successful march on Berlin. They were almost unanimous in

declaring that the soldiers would march back to Germany in a disciplined and orderly manner under their own officers, but that any attempt to induce them to crush the revolution by force would meet with a flat refusal. But even despite the dispassionate views of the generals at the front, the Kaiser issued instructions to march on Berlin. He refused to believe that his army had deserted him. The Court generals supported him in his personal sincere conviction that the troops would follow him, as soon as he placed himself at their head. But Hindenburg and Gröner stubbornly refused to sanction the order for the march on Berlin.

All night long on November 8th the Berlin Government kept ringing up Army Headquarters at Spa, demanding the immediate abdication of the Kaiser. Early in the forenoon of the following day they rang up again to tell Hindenburg that the Berlin workers had gone on strike and were parading the streets. This was followed by another message that several regiments in Berlin, among them those on whom the Kaiser thought he could depend implicitly, had sided with the insurgents. The Court generals at Spa refused to believe this dreadful news. Adjutant-General von Plessen and Count Schulenberg again demanded that Hindenburg and Gröner should give orders for the march on Berlin.

All the generals reported to the Kaiser at 11 a.m. Hindenburg made a detailed statement regarding conditions in Berlin and the Rhine provinces. He pointed out that the Rhine bridges and the railway lines leading to Berlin were in the hands of the insurgents. But even in the face of all this the Kaiser refused to give way. He stubbornly maintained that these disturbances could never develop into civil war. It was his intention to return to Germany at the head of his army.

After the Kaiser has issued this ultimatum, there was a

moment of tense silence as General Gröner rose to speak. His speech was very curt and concise.

“The army will march back home in an orderly and disciplined manner under their commanders and generals, but not under the command of Your Majesty. The army is no longer at your back.”

The Kaiser was dumbfounded. The idea that his army had deserted him was incomprehensible to him. He demanded that General Gröner should repeat his statement in writing. General Gröner did so.

Further news of disaster poured in from Berlin. The entire Berlin garrison had gone over to the insurgents at 11 a.m. When the Kaiser heard this he began to waver in his determination to march to Berlin at the head of the army. The Court generals now suggested to him that he should resign the Imperial throne, but still remain King of Prussia. The Kaiser accepted their suggestion, and refused to entertain General Gröner's view that it was now too late even for such a compromise.

Again Prince Max rang up from Berlin. He implored the Kaiser to abdicate. He assured him that if he did not do so at once, it would be too late to save the monarchy. But even then the Kaiser would not abdicate. At last, in order to avoid worse, and in the hope that he might save the dynasty, Prince Max took it upon himself to announce that the Kaiser had abdicated.

Prince Max was, at a later date, bitterly attacked by many people for his action, but in reality he had absolutely no alternative. Enormous crowds of workmen were surging towards Unter-den-Linden and the Wilhelmstrasse. A howling mob besieged the Reichstag. It was quite apparent that dangerous developments were imminent when Prince Max took it upon himself to announce, though he had no authority to do so, that the Kaiser had

abdicated. A few minutes after Prince Max had made this announcement, the following official statement was issued :

“ The Emperor King has decided to abdicate the throne. The Chancellor of the Reich will remain in office until the details connected with the abdication and the establishment of a regency are arranged.”

When the official statement was announced in Spa, the Kaiser informed those around him that he was still King of Prussia, and that nobody could depose him. At this point Hindenburg had to impress upon the Kaiser once more that the army would refuse to obey him. “ I would to God that it were otherwise, Your Majesty,” he added.

But even still the Kaiser would not listen to reason. He insisted that he would still remain King of Prussia. Say what he would, Hindenburg could not induce him to submit to the inevitable. He bitterly complained that he had been betrayed by Prince Max. He became so obsessed by his conviction of the Prince's treachery, as he brooded over the manner in which his abdication had been engineered in spite of himself, that he flew into a towering rage, and bringing his fist down heavily on the table, he roared :

“ So that is the way I have been treated by my last Chancellor.”

Meanwhile the generals had decided that the only way out of the difficulty was to send the Kaiser off to Holland as soon as possible. They felt that otherwise they could not guarantee his personal safety. They telephoned for the Royal train. It was very quickly at the railway-station under steam, ready for the journey to Holland. But the Kaiser refused to enter the train, and ordered large supplies of arms, ammunition and provisions to be despatched at once to his residence. He had apparently

made up his mind to put up a strenuous defence if the insurgents came looking for him.

As evening drew on, however, a good deal of his fighting spirit evaporated. He had supper on the Royal train, and instructed Admiral von Hintze, the Secretary of State, who stood by him to the last, to ring up Hindenburg and tell him that he would leave for Holland in the morning. At 9 p.m., however, he changed his mind again, and sent word to Hindenburg that he would not go to Holland. A message to the same effect was sent to the Crown Prince.

Just an hour later Hindenburg informed the Kaiser that revolutionary forces were marching on Spa, and that he could undertake no responsibility for what might occur during the course of the night. On hearing this startling news the Kaiser definitely made up his mind to leave Germany. At daybreak he set out for the Dutch frontier, accompanied by a few members of his retinue. When he arrived at the frontier he had to wait in a little guard-house for six hours, which seemed an eternity, before he received a passport from the Dutch Government permitting him to enter Holland. And so the Kaiser trod the soil of Germany for the last time.

CHAPTER XIII

HINDENBURG LEADS HIS DEFEATED ARMY HOME

“**N**EVER can a man foretell with certainty what will be the outcome of any enterprise he undertakes, but he who through a sense of conviction that he is doing what is right, just dutifully carries out his allotted task, is protected by a shield which, come what may, will always enable him to face calmly any crisis that may develop during his life, and will often even bring about a happy ending to such a crisis.”

These words, spoken by Field-Marshal Hermann von Boyen in 1811—that year of disaster for Prussia, formed Hindenburg’s motto during the years of the war. And now that the war was over, they enabled him to face philosophically the task that still awaited him before he could retire into private life.

Ludendorff was gone. The Kaiser was in exile in Holland. The Crown Prince soon followed him, after the new Government had declined to accept his offer to place himself at their services in any capacity. But though the stoutest props of the old regime had crumbled away, Hindenburg did not hesitate for a moment as to the course which he would adopt. He knew that it was his duty to stand by the army. He saw clearly that it was his duty to devote in the future all his energy to the Fatherland, as he did in the past, no matter what form of Government was in office in Berlin.

Ebert had succeeded Prince Max of Baden as Chancellor of the Reich, and Hindenburg unhesitatingly placed

himself at the disposal of the new guide of Germany's destiny. Ebert warmly thanked Hindenburg for his offer. He knew that owing to the confidence that the soldiers had in him and the great esteem which he enjoyed among all classes of the civilian population, the army would march back to Germany in perfect order under his control.

The Chancellor presided at a meeting of the Reichstag which issued an earnest appeal to the army to give implicit obedience to the commands of their superiors. It pointed out that it was the duty of "soldiers' councils" to assist the officers in every way possible in the task of maintaining discipline and order.

On November 12th Hindenburg issued an appeal to the troops to continue to fulfil their duty to the Fatherland. "The armistice has been signed," he said. "Until to-day we have carried our arms with honour. Thanks to its wholehearted devotion and loyalty the army has performed wonderful feats. Owing to the increasing numbers of our enemies and also to the collapse of our allies who stood by us until their strength was utterly spent, and owing to the food shortage which became more and more acute from day to day, as well as owing to economic difficulties, our Government has been forced to submit to harsh conditions of peace. But erect and proud we leave the battle which we have waged for over four years against a world of enemies. From the consciousness that we have defended our land and our honour to the utmost of our power, we gain new strength. By the terms of the armistice we have pledged ourselves to march back quickly to our native land, under the circumstances an extremely difficult task, which demands self-restraint and a strict sense of duty from each one of you, and a rigorous test of the spirit and the grit of the army. You have never failed your Field-Marshal in battle. And I still have confidence in you."

Hindenburg's confidence in his field-greys was not destined to be misplaced. Apart from a few minor breaches of discipline, the army returned to Germany in a perfectly orderly manner.

Even at that bitter moment—and it was exceedingly bitter to the old Field-Marshal who had been brought up in the old Prussian tradition, and whose family had been associated with the Hohenzollerns for centuries—the victor of Tannenberg was not a man of half-measures. Whatever he did, he did wholeheartedly and manfully, and typical of his public spirit was this letter which he addressed to the Chancellor of the Reich on December 9th :

“ In writing these few lines to you I am actuated by the fact that I am informed that you too, as a genuine German, love your Fatherland above everything else, subordinating to that love your own personal wishes and views. I have been obliged to do likewise in order to save the Fatherland in its hour of need. It is in this frame of mine that I have allied myself with you to save our people from imminent collapse. The fate of the German people has been placed in your hands. Upon your strength of character will depend whether the German people will attain once more to a new era of progress. I am prepared, and so is the whole army along with me, to support you unreservedly in your efforts to reach the goal at which you aim.

“ We are all aware that, owing to this lamentable ending of the war the reconstruction of the Reich can only be carried out in accordance with new principles and new rules. What we want to do is, not to delay the regeneration of the State for a generation by beginning by destroying through blindness and stupidity every prop of our economic and social life.”

With these simple words Hindenburg, the old soldier,

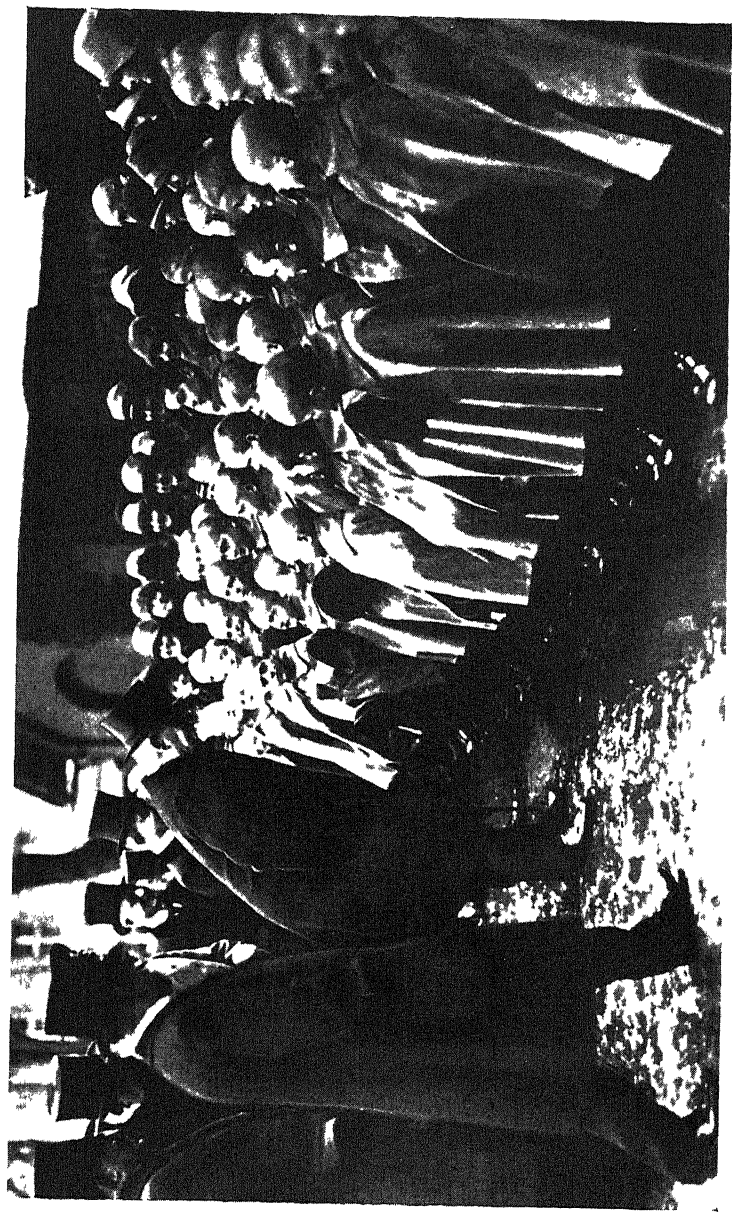
confidently stretched out his hand to form a bond with the Social Democrat Ebert, the first President of the Reich. And that bond pledged those two honourable and upright men to work together for the recovery of their Fatherland.

Hindenburg's work was not finished with bringing back the army to Germany. Black thunderclouds swelled up on the horizon on the eastern frontiers of the country. The Poles occupied the province of Posen. The frontiers of East Prussia and Silesia lay open and defenceless before them. The Russians also began to move towards Germany. The entire eastern frontier of Germany seemed to be once more menaced with war.

With a view to protecting East Prussia, Hindenburg transferred Army Headquarters from Kassel to Kolberg. It was impossible to gauge what the Bolsheviki might be contemplating.

On January 2nd they occupied Riga. Hindenburg sent a force to dislodge them, but it was not strong enough to cope with the Russians, and had to withdraw to the rear of the frontiers of East Prussia where it took up a defensive position. It was prepared to repel the Russians if they tried to invade German territory. The Supreme Command expected a further advance of the Red Army to support the Spartacus Movement which was gathering strength every day. The German "Reds" were anxiously waiting for the Russians to help them to establish a Bolshevik republic in the Fatherland. By February there were Bolshevik troops in Lithuania, barely a day's march from the frontiers of East Prussia.

Hindenburg at his headquarters in Kolberg was crouching once more over his old maps of the eastern theatre of war, evolving plans to repel the Russian hordes from his native land. The situation, however, did not appear to him to be so fraught with danger as it did to the politicians. He based his hopes on the resistance that the



TAT PRESIDENT MAKING FRIENDS WITH WAR ORPHANS



CHATTING WITH SOME OF THE BOYS IN THE MILITARY OKJHANAGJ IN JOISDAM

frontier states would put up. And his optimism was justified. The Russian menace gradually receded, and with it the Spartacus Movement dwindled more and more, and eventually died out.

Once the menace of a Russian attack had passed, Hindenburg considered that his task was done. He was very tired, and he longed to be able to retire after the strain of all those years of warfare. On May 2nd he requested the Government to relieve him of office. The following is an extract from his letter on that occasion to President Ebert :

“In these changed times I remained at the head of the Supreme Command, because I saw that it was my duty to serve the Fatherland in its hour of peril. As soon as the preliminaries of peace have been arranged, I consider that my task is done. You will appreciate my desire at my advanced age to retire. You will appreciate my desire all the more, as you are aware how difficult it would be for me to continue in office at the present time, seeing that my entire outlook on things and my political views belong to the past.”

Hindenburg addressed his old soldiers for the last time after signing the Treaty of Versailles. He thought that he owed them an explanation of his attitude towards the Treaty of Versailles :

“In due course I told the Government, that as a soldier I would prefer defeat with honour to a dishonourable peace,” he said in his farewell address. “And for this reason I feel that an explanation of my attitude is due to you. As I had at an earlier stage announced my intention of retiring to private life after the treaty was signed, I now resign my office as Commander-in-Chief. As I take leave of you, I feel deeply touched as I think of the many years during which I served under three Imperial and Royal

commanders-in-chief. Years of tranquil, yet strenuous work in peace times, years of triumph and great victories and years of stoic endurance against terrible odds arise before my eyes. But above all I think with an aching heart about those dreadful days when our Fatherland collapsed under the pressure of our enemies. The self-sacrificing loyalty and trustfulness with which officers, non-commissioned officers and men stood by me, were the only rays of hope that flashed through the gloom of that unspeakably desolate time. And for this I express my undying gratitude to you all, including the Volunteer Units which unremittingly kept guard on our Eastern Front."

In conclusion, Hindenburg appealed to his old soldiers in the following terms :

" How each one of us reacted to the happenings of the last few days, is his own affair. But each one of us should have only one motto for his actions—' The welfare of the Fatherland.' Our people are still in grave danger. The possibility of preserving internal peace and of developing a healthy and prosperous economic system depends absolutely on the steadfastness of our army. Therefore it is our duty to maintain this steadfastness. Our personal predilections must take a back place, severe though the strain may be on us. It is only by pulling together in harmony that we can, with God's help, eventually rescue our poor German Fatherland from the abyss into which it has sunk, and guide it on the path towards better days. Good-bye. I shall never forget you.

HINDENBURG."

CHAPTER XIV

"THE ARMY STABBED IN THE BACK!"

IN the forenoon of June 3rd, 1919, Hindenburg arrived at Hanover by special train, and was received at the railway-station by a guard of honour. As he stepped on the platform, military bands struck up martial airs. He was welcomed by the Chief Administrator of Hanover, the generals of the garrison, the chief burgomaster and all the leading officials of the city. An enormous crowd which had gathered in front of the railway-station greeted him with a wild outburst of cheering. The popularity of the old Field-Marshal had not suffered owing to the disastrous ending of the war.

On either side of the flower-decked motor-car in which he travelled slowly through the streets of the city, were lined up members of the students' unions, the school-children, as well as endless crowds of onlookers. In front of his new home, which had been presented to him during the war by the Corporation of Hanover, a battalion of infantry and a cavalry squadron were drawn up, and presented arms as the venerable Field-Marshal stepped out of his car.

In a few simple words, Hindenburg expressed his thanks for the reception which had been given to him. They were passing through a trying period, he said, but they must fight against the difficulties that assailed them. It was not a German characteristic to give way to despair. Everyone must contribute his share towards building up

a brighter future for Germany. Replying to the welcome extended to him by the students of Hanover, he said :

“ On the young people especially devolves the task of rebuilding our ruined Germany ; in our young people the spirit of Germany still glows. We shall succeed in regaining once more the esteem of those enemies who now despise and belittle us. God will help us—for God is still in His Heaven—in our struggle for a brighter future ! ”

The reception accorded to Hindenburg—a reception in which all classes of people joined—showed that he stood aloof from all party associations. And the troubled years that followed did not diminish the affection and esteem in which he was held by all his fellow-countrymen. Whenever he appeared in the streets of the city, he was surrounded by cheering crowds. “ As soon as I am recognised on the street, the traffic is held up,” he said one time to a knot of friends. “ It only means more work for the police. The result is that I have had to give up doing little odd messages for my wife, and we can’t take a stroll through the streets together without being held up by crowds of warm-hearted Hanoverians.”

Hindenburg’s favourite recreation was a long tramp through the country-side on the outskirts of Hanover. He was particularly fond of walking among the venerable trees of the Eilenreide, a magnificent wood quite near his home. In this way he always managed to keep perfectly fit. He had always been a man of iron nerves, and had never shown the faintest trace of agitation even during the most critical and dangerous moments of the war. It was lucky for him that nature had given him such extraordinary powers of resistance and resilience. And although the strain of the long war years and of his even more trying post-war experiences had told on him, and he was glad to retire, he seemed immune to the ravages of old age.

Shortly after his retirement he resumed his old hobby of deer-stalking. His favourite hunting-ground was among the Bavarian mountains, where he was a frequent guest of the von Schilcher family at their stately manor in Dithramszell, a former Augustinian monastery, which was surrounded by magnificent forest-lands. He would spend hours at a stretch tracking down a chamois, and would tackle the steepest and loftiest mountain and the longest and most rugged paths in quest of game with all the zest of his younger days.

But the old soldier found that he could not devote all his time to his favourite hobby. Every morning piles of letters had to be answered. He was eternally besieged with requests to attend festivals and gala-meetings, to open fêtes and bazaars, and to receive deputations from national organisations or from social or welfare organisations. He considered it his duty to comply as far as possible with these manifold demands on his time, as he felt that he was thereby helping to inspire courage in the hearts of all those who in their various ways were working for the regeneration of Germany.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff were summoned to appear on November 18th, 1919, before a Commission of Enquiry into the causes of the loss of the war by Germany. This commission which was instituted by the Reichstag, was the outcome of the political hysteria which had swayed popular opinion during the year 1919. The newspapers which voiced the sentiments of the Right, had protested that Hindenburg was not responsible for the collapse of the army on the Western Front—that the onus of that disaster lay on the Reichstag itself. The Government itself and the Committee of Enquiry had hesitated about summoning the venerable Field-Marshal, but Ludendorff insisted that his superior officer should be present at the investigations as well as himself. It is true that Ludendorff had virtually

been Germany's dictator during the war, but for all that, Hindenburg had signed all the political and military documents drawn up by his subordinate during that time. It was impossible for the Committee to ignore this point put forward by Ludendorff, and although all the members of the Committee felt embarrassed at the idea of summoning Hindenburg, they had to brace themselves for the unpleasant task.

When Hindenburg arrived in Berlin in response to the summons issued by the Committee of Enquiry, there was tremendous excitement in the city. The Government did everything in their power to make things as easy as possible for him. A guard of honour was drawn up at the railway-station in Berlin to meet him, and the Minister of War appointed two officers of the German army as his aides-de-camp during his stay in the city. Two military sentries were posted outside his quarters in the house of Herr Helfferich, formerly the German Secretary of State, who had insisted that he should be his guest. Here he met Ludendorff again for the first time since October 26th, 1918. They thoroughly discussed the attitude which they intended to adopt before the Committee of Enquiry. Their contention that the Committee had no authority to demand any explanation from them about the cause that led to Germany losing the war, was warmly supported by numerous leading politicians of the Right who called to see them at Herr Helfferich's residence.

There was great excitement in the vicinity of the Reichstag on the opening day—incidentally also the last day—of the sitting of the Committee of Enquiry. Strong police forces were drawn across all the streets debouching on the building. The barrels of machine-guns pointed menacingly in every direction. Barbed wire entanglements were set up across the main streets. Mounted police kept back the crowds that cheered and booed Hindenburg.

The scene was reminiscent of the ugliest days of the Revolution. Police lined the road on both sides from Herr Helfferich's residence to the Reichstag. Inside the building itself, too, there was a very strong guard of police.

As the motor-car conveying Hindenburg and Ludendorff drew up slowly in front of the Reichstag, a tornado of cheers and groans burst forth from the serried crowds who were held back by the mounted police. The tumultuous demonstrations of the multitude outside was in strange contrast with the silence and tension in the crowded hall in which the Committee met. The Chairman of the Committee, Deputy Gotheim, greeted Hindenburg and Ludendorff courteously. Everyone was impressed by the dramatic significance of the scene that was set. Hindenburg and Ludendorff were arraigned by the Reichstag and the people of Germany to render an account for the loss of the war !

After the conclusion of the formal preliminaries, Ludendorff rose, and in an abrupt and rather acid tone, started to read from a voluminous document a detailed vindication of his own attitude and that of Hindenburg during the war. After pointing out that he was speaking on behalf of the Field-Marshal, he asserted that the Committee had no legal right to make either of them answerable to any sworn enquiry. The Committee was not vested with authority to cross-examine Hindenburg and himself as if they were ordinary witnesses in a civil or criminal suit. They were quite prepared, on the other hand, to make a voluntary statement as to the causes which impelled them, in view of the varying military exigencies at various periods of the war, to adopt the measures which they deemed expedient.

The chairman, courteously but firmly, refused to entertain Ludendorff's contention, and proceeded with the enquiry forthwith by calling on Hindenburg to give evidence.

Without raising his eyes for a moment from the manuscript in front of him, Hindenburg began to state his views regarding the ethics of war and the role of a commander-in-chief, when the chairman interrupted him with the remark that the Committee were not interested in such generalisations about war. The members of the Committee desired to ask definite questions, which the witnesses would be obliged to answer. Hindenburg took absolutely no notice, however, of the chairman's ruling, but merely continued to read on quietly. He did not even do the chairman the scant courtesy of looking up at him. There was no trace of emotion in his voice as he stated in curt, clear words, without laying undue emphasis even on a syllable, that both himself and Ludendorff had accepted their posts during the war for the sole purpose of leading Germany to victory. He added that it was the duty of a commander to devote all his energies towards that goal.

The chairman rang his bell, and said rather irritably that Hindenburg had no right to denounce political conditions in Germany during the course of the war. But the stoic veteran who had listened phlegmatically for the crash of four thousand pieces of artillery on the Western Front on a spring morning in 1918, was not unnerved by the rattling of a bell by an irascible little deputy, clothed in brief authority. He read on, coldly, impersonally. He asserted that during the war the Reichstag lacked the will to victory, while in the enemy countries all political parties and all sections of the community worked together strenuously in the determination to win through. But in the case of Germany, the more acute the position became during the war, the more pronounced were the party cleavages for interested motives. In order to win the war he expected vigour and co-operation from the Reichstag, but he met with nothing but rebuffs and vacillation.

Hindenburg's indictment of his judges concluded with

the memorable words : “ The German army was stabbed in the back. It is unnecessary for me to point my finger at the guilty parties.”

The witness, having thus arraigned the Committee of Enquiry, sat down.

There was a moment of tense silence. The members of the Committee were in a dilemma. They knew that there was no use in asking Hindenburg any direct questions. He would not answer them. He had not even taken the faintest notice of the chairman’s bell-ringing or of his choler. Well, the only thing for it was to insist upon Ludendorff giving direct answers to pointed questions.

The members of the Committee had old scores against him. They had found it very difficult to get on with him during the war, when he was vested with a virtual dictatorship in the political as well as in the military sphere. But now their roles were reversed. He was in their power. The hectoring general who had rode rough-shod over them during the war was now in the dock, so to speak, and would have to render an account to a Committee of the people’s parliament for his arbitrary actions when in power.

But, to their dismay, they saw that Ludendorff had taken his cue from Hindenburg. He, too, produced a document, and began to indict the Committee. Heedless of the frenzied ringing of the chairman’s bell, he contended that the indiscriminate submarine campaign had been started too late. Had the transport of munitions from America been cut off by our U-boats, the terrible holocaust of lives at Verdun would not have occurred. The Supreme Command had fully calculated that unrestricted submarine warfare would have entailed war with America, probably even with Holland and Denmark. But the Supreme Command would have made all due arrangements in good time to meet those contingencies. The Supreme Command

had always the welfare of the Fatherland as their sole objective all through the war. Was it now suggested that the generals responsible for the decision of the Supreme Command should be victimised for doing their duty?

The chairman made another effort to stem the tide of Ludendorff's eloquence, but the venerable Dietrich Schäffer insisted that Ludendorff should be allowed to continue. He maintained that in order to form a fair opinion of the activities of the Supreme Command it was absolutely essential to get Ludendorff's point of view.

Hereupon the Committee of Enquiry adjourned to consider Herr Schäfer's proposal, and after spending an hour wrangling violently among themselves, they returned to the hall. The chairman now announced that the Committee had decided that Ludendorff would not be permitted to speak any further. It was an outrage on the dignity of the Reichstag and of German parliamentary institutions generally to permit him thus to ignore the ruling of the chair. He would have to remember that he was a witness before the Committee, and answer the questions put to him.

The *questionnaire* which Ludendorff had now to face was a formidable one. He was asked first of all whether it was true that, after the breaking off of diplomatic relations with America, he had stated at Supreme Command Headquarters, in the hearing of Count Bernstorff, formerly German Ambassador at Washington, that the Supreme Command had not desired to remain at peace with America.

Ludendorff angrily repudiated this charge. He said that he had never held the view that Germany should go out of her way to increase the number of nations at war with her. The only question that ever weighed with him was the welfare of the Fatherland.

So far Hindenburg had listened in silence and an impassive expression to the proceedings. But now he

stood up, his eyes ablaze with anger, and brought down his fist with such force on the table that he scattered the documents on it in all directions. In a voice of thunder he said he would not, for a moment, tolerate the insinuation that Ludendorff was not always actuated during the war by his anxiety for the welfare of the Fatherland. He had given his sanction to everything that Ludendorff had done during the war. For every order Ludendorff issued, he accepted full responsibility. He would never permit the dissemination of the slanderous statement that there had been any divergences of opinion between himself and his loyal colleague.

Hindenburg's outburst of righteous indignation brought the abortive proceedings of the Committee of Enquiry to an abrupt end. The tables had been turned on the judges. No definite findings had been made against either Hindenburg or Ludendorff, but the two generals had made serious and irrefutable charges against the war-time Government, the war-time Reichstag and the war-time politicians.

The chairman decided to adjourn the enquiry. He asked Hindenburg if it would be convenient for him to attend the following morning. Hindenburg replied, wearily, that it really didn't matter much whether he attended or not. And so this farcical enquiry came to an end. Everybody present, including Hindenburg and Ludendorff, knew that the Committee would never meet again. All they had succeeded in doing was to provide excellent material for the joke-smiths of the Right Press the following morning.

An enormous crowd collected at the railway-station to give Hindenburg an ovation on his departure from Berlin, and a guard of honour drew up on the platform. He also got an enthusiastic reception on his arrival in Hanover. The summons before the Committee of Enquiry had evolved into a triumph for him.

Later on, when political feeling ran high as the result of the Kapp *putsch*, large bodies of workmen instigated by the Left Radical group in the Reichstag collected in front of the veteran soldier's residence, and indulged in angry demonstrations. The army authorities promptly sent a bodyguard of old war-seasoned non-commissioned officers to stay in his house until the trouble blew over. The Left Radicals also made themselves very unpleasant once more to Hindenburg after the assassination of Rathenau. He was falsely charged with having supported the secret organisations of the Right. In the Hanover Council Chamber, in which there was a "Red" majority, he was the victim of envenomed and utterly unjustifiable attacks. He never lost his composure, as a result of these gratuitous onslaughts, and once remarked jocosely that very probably the "Red" Corporation of Hanover would one day evict him from his residence, as it was the property of the City.

It was always an enigma to Hindenburg that Germans, the citizens of a common Fatherland, should indulge in bitter political feuds with one another. He always maintained that a common platform could easily be found for all the citizens, if they honestly wished to pull together. On the occasion of the launching of the *Hindenburg*, a steamer built by the firm of Hugo Stinnes, the veteran Field-Marshal, at the christening ceremony expressed the hope that the new vessel might serve as a symbolical bond to unite all the nations together. "This," he said, "is the earnest wish of an old soldier who knows the horrors of war, and therefore esteems all the more the blessings of an honourable peace."

On May 13th, 1920, Hindenburg met with the most terrible blow in his lifetime in the death of his wife, after a long illness during the course of which she underwent several serious operations. The City of Hanover presented

the bereaved Field-Marshal on this occasion with a magnificent burial site. On the day of the funeral thousands walked in the procession to the cemetery, and all the flags of the city were flown at half-mast.

Hindenburg visited his wife's grave daily ever afterwards during his residence in Hanover, and used to remain there for hours at a time absorbed in prayer and meditation. He always told his family that it was his desire to be laid beside his life-mate when his time came. However, fate and his country decided that he should sleep his last long sleep on the field of Tannenberg—the site of the most memorable of his victories.

In his desolation and loneliness he had one comfort in the fact that his son Oscar was stationed in Hanover as Captain of the General Staff of the Army. Furthermore, his younger daughter, Frau Tittmeister von Pentz, frequently came with her children on a visit from Luneberg, where her husband was also an army officer. Luneberg was quite near Hanover, and the veteran soldier always looked forward eagerly to the visits of his daughter and grandchildren.

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CHAPTER XV

PRESIDENT OF THE REICH

HINDENBURG declined every invitation to take active part in the political struggle. He would not be influenced by any party, and canvassed for none. All his utterances bore witness to his strictest impartiality. He always had the whole nation in mind, always pleaded for national unity, always sought to effect a compromise between opposing parties. The Fatherland must be the first consideration. The politicians of the day could not influence the modest diffidence which was characteristic of the Field-Marshal. He would not strive for new powers and new posts of honour. He had done his duty, and desired to spend the evening of his life in quietude. Younger hands must steer the Ship of State.

When President Ebert succumbed much too soon to the effects of neglected appendicitis, nobody thought of Hindenburg as Ebert's successor. The proverbial discord of the Germans again showed itself in an unpleasant light. To produce unity among the citizens proved an impossibility. Nine candidates were nominated. The German National Liberal Movement, the subsequent National Socialists, selected Ludendorff as their leader ; this, however, was a hopeless beginning owing to the strong dislike which at that time prevailed against the General, especially after the Kapp *putsch* and the Munich riots. Neither was the candidate of the United Conservative Parties, Dr. Jarres, the former Minister of the

Interior and now Chief Burgomaster of Duisburg, capable of securing a decisive electoral success. He was not sufficiently popular to gain votes for his candidature from the other political groups. The German Nationalists and the members of the German People's Party realised that they would be defeated with Dr. Jarres in the second elective process. Considering the strength of the opposition, only a very popular personality had the prospect of obtaining a sufficient number of votes.

The Democrats, the Centre Party and the Social Democrats, were united for the second electoral contest of the former Reichschancellor Marx, whose selection was canvassed for by the "National Block." A large and powerful organisation was at the disposal of the Social Democrats. The Trades Unions, as well as the "Reichsbanners," in whose ranks all parties of the Weimar coalition were represented, worked energetically on behalf of this candidate. Marx, of course, was a Catholic, and a large number of Germans in the north were opposed to seeing a representative of the Centre Party in the highest position of the State.

The Conservatives were lacking in strong united fighting organisations. They were split into many groups, large and small, all of which followed their own particular interests. In the first place, there was great perplexity as to how the united strength of the opposition could be successfully met. It was difficult to create a compromise between the wishes of Hugenberg and those of the German People's Party. There was no outstanding political personality. The financing of the election campaign also met with difficulties. Hugenberg was, of course, only prepared to sanction the necessary financial means, if a man was put up, of whom his party approved.

The arguments continued, until at last a representative of the "Reichsblock," as the Conservative electioneering

organisation was called, spoke the saving word : " Hindenburg ! " But immediately, hesitation again asserted itself. The Left Wing of the German People's Party, and above all the Foreign Minister, Dr. Stresemann, considered this choice, with all his personal respect for the Field-Marshal, unfortunate by reason of foreign political considerations. Stresemann feared that the choice of the Field-Marshal as Reichspresident might endanger his peace policy, and would be regarded by foreign countries with suspicion. The majority of his party, however, were in favour of Hindenburg.

Now came the great question : " Will the Field-Marshal, who has always refused hitherto to take an active part in politics, accept nomination ? " Cautious enquiries made by several German Nationalist leaders resulted in a decided " No ! " He was not a politician ; he detested internal political strife ; he did not want to know anything about Party quarrels and vexatious political intrigues. Besides, he was much too old to enter into the turmoil of political activity. After this refusal to the German Nationalists, the former generals and fellow-combatants of the Field-Marshal obtained no better result. " I am no Party man," declared Hindenburg, " and do not wish to be."

The Field-Marshal's attitude was perhaps also influenced by the failure which General Ludendorff suffered in the electoral campaign. The adherents of the German National Liberal Movement carried on a specially disagreeable agitation, and thereby dragged Hindenburg and Ludendorff into the political arena. During the World War, Ludendorff, not Hindenburg, was the real driving force, they said. To him Germany was indebted for its military successes. He was the real hero of Tannenberg. Hindenburg had always been the alleged victor, they contended ; he was merely the puppet. Only



WITH HIS GRAND CHILDREN



MILITARY TATTOO IN THE GARDEN OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE
REICH

Ludendorff possessed the wide outlook and the energy to lead Germany to triumph again. The election meetings of the German Liberal Party were continued on this note. All the passions of war and of defeat were again let loose. The old antagonisms in the nation were still further aggravated, and the prestige of both Commanders was dragged in the mire. The Field-Marshal had endeavoured in vain to restrain Ludendorff from putting up as a candidate. He saw in advance that the general would not play a happy role. In a letter he begged him not to allow himself to be drawn into the front line of the political struggle. But Hindenburg's exhortations fell on the deaf ears of this ambitious, conceited man.

No wonder that Hindenburg, after these experiences, bluntly refused to allow his name to be drawn into the electoral contest. What would public opinion say, if he, who had served under three Kaisers, sought to obtain the highest position in the new State? Although from a sense of duty he had immediately placed himself at the disposal of the first Reichspresident, Ebert, he was not a Republican. He had never made a secret of his monarchist convictions, even though the Fatherland was for him above Party and above the old form of Government. It was clear that for Germany in its existing position, and the temper of the people being what it was, the only form of Government possible, was the Republican. He also acknowledged the goodwill of the new men, and expressed his appreciation of the services they had rendered to the Fatherland in its darkest hour. In 1919 Germany would have fallen into the toils of Spartacism had it not been for the attitude of the Social Democratic leaders. The Field-Marshal also knew in his heart that if he accepted the post of President of the German Republic, this step would mean the breaking of the tradition, that he was and must remain the first and most faithful guardian

of the Weimar Constitution. Could he reconcile the oath which he had sworn to the Kaiser, with the Republican point of view ?

The leading men of the Reichsblock were extremely disappointed at Hindenburg's refusal. They knew that only under the watchword "Hindenburg" could they gain the victory. Should they lay down their arms ? Perhaps that would have the effect of convincing Hindenburg ! Of course, the aged, unpretentious soldier was not going to be caught with political arguments, however much he desired a victory for the Right.

The German Nationalists had another trump-card up their sleeve. In their ranks was a master of the art of persuasion, who, although he belonged to the German Nationalist Party, was far from being a "one-sided" Party man. This was Admiral of the Fleet von Tirpitz. At the insistence of his Party friends, Tirpitz decided to undertake the task of visiting Hindenburg and to use every possible means to overcome his obstinacy. The two high officials of the old army and the old navy sat opposite each other for a long time, in Hindenburg's study. Impressively Tirpitz described the need of the Fatherland and referred to the consequences which, in his opinion might arise, in case a representative of the Radical Party—in which he also reckoned the former Reichschancellor, Wilhelm Marx—should again take up his quarters for seven long years in the Reichspresident's palace in the Wilhelmstrasse. In this respect Hindenburg agreed with the arguments of the admiral, but he insisted that surely there were younger men in the Conservative Party and men better schooled in politics than he was.

Tirpitz did not allow this objection to pass. Hindenburg was now the favourite of the German nation, he pointed out ; the Conservatives could not put up a better man than the saviour of East Prussia. It was not the German

National Party that called him, but the German Fatherland, the entire German people, all nationally-minded men and women, and above all, his old front-line comrades. The most superior elements in the State saw in him their deliverer, the admiral went on. Never had Hindenburg refused, when the well-being of the Fatherland was at stake. He could not refuse to pay heed to the universal wishes of all good Germans ; it was his duty to bow to the call of the majority of the people.

The admiral passed over in silence the wishes of equally valuable and equally patriotically-minded circles with regard to the choice of a Reichspresident—not for personal, but for objective reasons. With Stresemann, many feared a dangerous reaction in foreign policy if Hindenburg were elected. They did not believe that the aged soldier, in accordance with his whole education and tradition, would, in spite of his most honest intentions, be able to sink all his old prejudices and withdraw from the narrow-minded influence of the conservative circles with which he was closely connected, and place himself behind the new form of Government and the peace policy initiated by Stresemann.

At the mention of the word “duty,” Hindenburg pricked up his ears. He had never in his life neglected his duty. Yes, he was, on principle, prepared to answer the call of the Fatherland, he said, but he asked for a short breathing-space. He desired, first of all, to inform his Kaiser of this step, and to be released from his oath, before taking over the leadership of the German Republic.

Within a few days, what the Conservatives thought an impossibility had become a reality ; Hindenburg came forward as a candidate for the highest post in the new Germany. He was ready to become the chief representative of the Republic, to place himself entirely at the disposal of the reconstruction of the new State. Then there was a

concentration of forces in order to bring about a victory at the polls. After the Field-Marshal had been urged into the front line of the political struggle, it was of the utmost importance that the electoral struggle should be successfully conducted. The old electoral passions were awakened, but the new task provided him with fresh energy. He spared no pains, in order to reply to the innumerable letters which now arrived daily. A staff of loyal helpers met at Hindenburg's house in Hanover, in order to assist him in this work. His most intimate colleagues were former officers of Army Headquarters, with whom he had untiringly laboured during the war. He was confident that they could be trusted to do everything possible, in their devotion to duty.

To conduct the electoral campaign for Hindenburg was not easy. He was saddled with the responsibility for the unfortunate result of the war. He was responsible for signing the precipitate armistice offer of Ludendorff. Was this aged general with his seventy-seven years still fresh enough to occupy the highest post in the State? people asked. Would not a younger, more energetic politician be more adapted to control the destinies of Germany? What did Hindenburg understand of the difficult political and economic problems which were awaiting solution in the next few years? He himself had always emphasized how distasteful politics were to him—that he understood nothing about them. And now they wanted to bring this non-political general out of the trap-door, as it were, to fill the highest political post! Of course, no one could make any reflection on him personally. Everybody knew the sincerity and integrity of his character.

The opposition found it easy to bring heavy guns into the battle against his candidature. During the war Hindenburg had again and again misunderstood Germany's position, it was contended. He was responsible

for the holding out to the end. He advocated the unrestricted U-boat war, which led America to side with our enemies. He had imposed a frightful sacrifice upon the German nation, which subsequently proved useless. Above all, he was a monarchist, and would make use of his position as Reichspresident, to restore the monarchy. The Field-Marshal would consider himself as the viceroy of the Hohenzollerns. Under his influence the Reichswehr would become a reactionary instrument against the new State. Many already saw appearing on the horizon the frightful spectre of the war of revenge preached by the German Nationalists.

Hindenburg's opponent, Wilhelm Marx, was a better and more successful statesman, and at the same time a man of sincere character. Marx would certainly not hurl Germany into any political adventure. As an old, trained and experienced parliamentarian, he stood for a policy of moderation. He was an excellent speaker and a clever diplomat. To him the fate of Germany could be entrusted without anxiety.

It was a keen struggle. Both candidates had many things in their favour. Hindenburg's heroic record never failed to make an impression on the masses. Marx was a shrewd politician. The third candidate for the post of president, the Communist transport-worker, Ernst Thaelmann, would only be canvassed for by his Party and had from the first no prospect of victory. That the Communists, however, at the last minute, in order to prevent a victory for the Conservatives, would stand for the opposition candidate, Marx, for the man of the Central Party and a devout Catholic and capitalist, whom their fiercest enemies, the Social Democrats, supported, was not to be expected.

The views of foreign countries also played an important role in the electoral contest. Germany was dependent

on foreign countries for her reconstruction, and this reconstruction could only be achieved with the aid of large foreign loans. The Government, the municipalities and industrial concerns, were striving hard for foreign credits. Only if foreign countries were prepared to grant new and extensive credits, would exhausted Germany be able to keep alive. Without the confidence of foreign countries in the policy of Stresemann, all hope of new credits was in vain. The French were always ready to march into the Rhineland. A new occupation of the Ruhr threatened, if Germany did not pay the frightful imposts of the Dawes Plan.

Scarcely had the announcement of Hindenburg's candidature been received in foreign countries, when the Jingo Press started a fierce agitation against Germany and the Field-Marshal. "The election of Hindenburg means War!" was the headline in large capitals, in the French Conservative Press. Numerous English newspapers also warned Germany against the election of Hindenburg. The Americans saw the peace of Europe endangered, and with that the loss of their money invested on the Continent. The German Radical Press published in their daily columns, innumerable foreign comments, protesting vehemently against the election of the Field-Marshal. The "Reichsblock" was able to do very little to oppose these arguments. In foreign countries Hindenburg had hardly any friends.

Shortly before the nomination date various political leaders, out of honest apprehension for the Fatherland, endeavoured, with political and personal arguments, to move the Field-Marshal to withdraw his candidature. In his advanced age, they pointed out, he was not equal to the great demands which the office of Reichspresident made. There were difficult years and great disappointments in front of Germany. He should not stake the

enormous respect which his name commanded in the German nation. But Hindenburg was not to be dissuaded from his duty. He felt that the majority of the German people were behind him.

On Sunday, April 26th, 1925, came at last the great decision. Up to the last moment motor-lorries packed with voters passed through the streets of Berlin. On the pavements and on the asphalt roads there were heaps of leaflets. The people assembled in crowds before the polling stations. On all sides every voter was eagerly canvassed. The first election results announced enormous figures for Marx. Above all, in the great capitals, Marx had gained an overwhelming superiority. The Radicals were triumphant; victory for their candidate appeared certain. Only in the night hours did the picture begin to change. Gains for Hindenburg were slowly pouring in. The counting of the ballot papers from the country was progressing slowly. But now the telegrams announced more favourable figures for Hindenburg. East Prussia had not forgotten its deliverer. Apart from Königsberg, Hindenburg had gained an overwhelming majority in almost all the towns and villages of that province. Pomerania had also voted almost exclusively for Hindenburg. Large numbers of these votes were not given to the candidate of the Reichsblock, but to the personality of the Field-Marshal. For the very reason that Hindenburg was not a Party man, he succeeded in gaining votes from the Radical camp.

Nevertheless, the victory was only a narrow one; 14,639,395 votes were registered for Hindenburg and 13,653,642 against, which Marx could claim for himself. But even this trifling majority was sufficient. General Field-Marshal Paul von Hindenburg was elected Reichs-president, by the will of the people. The parties to the Weimar Coalition were stunned. They had not expected it. The Communist, Ernst Thaelmann, had ensured

Hindenburg's success. "Rather Hindenburg than Marx," was his slogan shortly before the election. After the publication of the result, wild rumours ran from mouth to mouth. Everyone knew when the next war would begin, when Kaiser Wilhelm, accompanied by the Reichspresident, would make his victorious entry through the Brandenburg Gate.

Neither had foreign countries counted on a victory for Hindenburg. In the Press of our former enemies, especially in the French Press, a fierce storm was let loose against Germany. The election of Marshal von Hindenburg, stated the Paris *Temps*, was a challenge to the allies, to Europe and to America. In Hindenburg were embodied all the powers of reaction and of brutal revenge, which now hoped for a swift restoration of Germany's military power. The election of Hindenburg meant the announcement of a prompt fall of the Republican Government and the return of the Hohenzollerns. It meant the rejection of the peace policy, and the desire for a revision of the Treaty of Versailles, even if not for its destruction. It was an impudent challenge to all the forces of reconciliation and of peace, which desired to bring about the reconstruction of Europe on the basis of guaranteed security.

The overwhelming majority of the English papers also made severe attacks on Hindenburg and Germany. "Hindenburg," wrote the *Morning Post*, "embodies the German empire. His election as President of the German Republic is the gravest event in world politics since the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia." Concluding its comment, the *Morning Post* demanded as a reply to Hindenburg's election, the immediate conclusion of a Franco-British-Belgian alliance against Germany. Even moderate papers, like *The Times*, did not conceal their discontent. The election of Hindenburg was confusing to European politics and was disturbing to the hitherto existing

co-operation of the powers. The majority of the German people had misunderstood the true national interests when they gave their votes to Hindenburg, according to *The Times*. The attitude adopted by the American Press was almost the same. But one section of the American Press endeavoured at least to explain the reasons why the German people had decided for Hindenburg. The *New York Herald* hit the mark when it said : " The reasons for Hindenburg's victory lie deeply rooted in human nature. He is indebted for his election to his uncommon personal fame, to the general homage paid to him, to the blind faith which the German people place in him as the traditional hero, as the embodiment of the virtues of the old heroes of Valhalla. But the most profound reason for this choice is to be sought for in the mentality of the Germans : Hindenburg appeals to their national pride."

The Italian Fascist Press adopted a divergent view of this event, and was actuated in its tone by the antipathy between Mussolini's Government and France. " Hindenburg's election," it was stated in one of the leading Italian newspapers, " shows that the reconstruction of Germany has already made good progress. For this reason foreign countries find themselves opposed to this election. But only France is interested in the exhaustion and disintegration of Germany. The rest of Europe, on the contrary, can only be desirous of seeing Germany again on her feet."

Essentially different is the picture in neutral countries. The *Svenska Dagbladet*, for example, wrote : " The election of Hindenburg proves emphatically that the German people, in spite of the frightful catastrophe which they have experienced, have not yet surrendered. It is a proof of sound self-confidence, but does not necessarily signify the desire for revenge." Another Swedish paper, *The Nation*, expressed itself with special appreciation : " Hindenburg was the saviour of the Fatherland. He

accomplished the most brilliant act of the World War when he stopped the Russian steamroller and thereby freed the Baltic provinces from the Asiatic yoke. This achievement was a victory for European culture. And when the fortune of war deserted the German arms, he led the army back into its native soil in peace and order. Only his authority made such a retreat possible. In this way he spared both nation and people incalculable misfortune. A nation does not forget such things."

Similar opinions came from Holland and from Switzerland. But pessimistic conclusions were also drawn by large sections of the Press in both of these countries. According to the *Neuer Züricher Zeitung*, the German Republic, by its election of Hindenburg, had lost its first great battle; the new German nation had failed to pass its first leaving examination. Every democratic republic must be dismayed at the news of Germany's choice, it contended.

But the opinion of the Press is not by a long way decisive for the interpretation of a political event. Sensationalism and Party-interests to a large extent guide the pen of the journalist. Many papers live on the stirring up of internal and foreign political passions, and on the instigation of parties and peoples against each other. The authoritative politicians of foreign countries judged the situation from the first in a more moderate manner. In the political and diplomatic circles of France, England and America, they were convinced that the trend of German domestic and international politics would not be altered by the election of Hindenburg. The majority of the Reichstag stood firm on the ground of the Weimar Coalition and of the international treaties. The person of Stresemann was also a guarantee of good faith that Germany's present policy would be continued.

On the day after the election, one of the greatest and

most popular statesmen in the United States, for many years chairman of the Committee of the Senate for Foreign Affairs, Senator Borah—who only recently, on the occasion of the visit of the French Prime Minister, M. Laval, had very strongly advocated a revision of the Versailles Treaty in favour of Germany and for the welfare of the world—declared that the election of Hindenburg was in no way a reason for alarm. Conducted on the right lines, the national feeling now awakening in Germany could render important assistance in the reconstruction of Europe.

None of the expected fears were, in fact, justified. Reichspresident von Hindenburg had no intention of interfering with or varying Germany's foreign policy. Everything in Germany remained as before. Indeed, the fact that the Field-Marshal now stood at the head of the Republic, forced numerous conservative circles to a different idea of the new form of Government. Stresemann steadfastly piloted the course of peace. Hindenburg also saw in the reconciliation of the nations—in an honest reconciliation with France as well as with the other former enemy states—the only way to recovery. He knew the frightfulness of war too well, not to love peace sincerely. After a few months the opinions about the new Reichspresident in Radical circles were essentially different. The signing of the Locarno Treaty reduced even the rank Radicals of the Paris Press completely to silence.

In November, 1925, six months after the election of the Reichspresident, a leading Paris newspaper declared: "The new President of the German Republic shows a typical loyalty not only to the German State, but also to foreign powers." The London *Daily News* expressed itself in a similar manner: "The events of the last six months have shown that the very natural fears which were engendered by the election of Hindenburg as President, were not justified. England cannot withhold from Hindenburg that

recognition which he undoubtedly deserves, owing to the fact that he has steadfastly refused to adopt the point of view of the Nationalists ; as well as owing to his shrewdness, moderation and the dignified attitude he has shown from the moment he became the Republican head of the German nations." In a later article the same paper said : " He is a monument of morality, rising supreme and defiant above the ruins of a mighty empire."

Hindenburg, representing a bygone age, was a lonely, courageous man, who kept faithful watch over the Fatherland. The hopes which the Chauvinists had coupled with the election of Hindenburg as President, had been bitterly disappointed. The German people had given Hindenburg their votes because he had proved a hero and a man of honour in the great tragedy through which they had passed. He owed this election not to his views, but to his character. That a monarchist like Hindenburg should show his faith in the Republic, was sure proof of the simplicity and integrity of his character. When, face to face with the collapse of Germany, he had to choose between the Kaiser and the Fatherland, his sense of duty led him to the side of the people. For him the Republic had become the Fatherland ; therefore he obeyed it and served it.

CHAPTER XVI

HINDENBURG AS A STATESMAN

HIGH hopes for the Conservatives, anxious suspense for the Radicals. What would the next seven years bring? The consolidation, or the collapse, of the new form of Government? These were the questions asked among wide circles of the people when, on May 11th, 1925, Reichspresident von Hindenburg made his State entry into the capital of the Reich.

The Government endeavoured to give the head of the State a worthy reception. The Republic had finished with the exaggerated pomp of the Hohenzollern period. Such luxury was not suitable for an impoverished Germany. But as the example of France teaches, the Republic also requires a worthy representation and a permanent ceremonial. Reichspresident Ebert and his Secretary of State, Dr. Meissner, had endeavoured from the beginning to give the representative organisations of the Republic a permanent, simple, dignified form.

About midday the Reichspresident left his villa in Hanover and went to the railway-station. He was no longer a private individual. Honours were conferred upon him as the Head of the State. In front of the station the customary guard of honour had taken up its position. The chiefs of the public and municipal authorities, as well as the entire officers' corps of the garrison-town, were assembled. Neither were the common people prevented

from giving their farewell greeting to the honorary freeman of the town. The Chief Administrator of Hanover, Herr Noske, who, as Minister of the Reichswehr, was senior officer during the first months of the new Republic, welcomed the Reichspresident in a short, formal address. Shortly afterwards the regular express train with Hindenburg's saloon-carriage attached moved out of the station and sped through the wide Hanoverian plains. Thoughtfully Hindenburg looked out of the window. The longed-for rest was gone. He had begun a new phase of life. Twice had he marched as a young, energetic man, at the termination of a victorious war, through the Brandenburg Gate into Berlin. Now, an old man, he must make his solemn entry for the third time—as President of the Reich. What a strange dispensation of God !

At Berlin railway-station he was welcomed by the members of the Cabinet under the leadership of their Chancellor, Dr. Luther. The little ten-year-old daughter of the Chancellor recited a short poem and handed the Reichspresident a bouquet. While the guard of honour presented arms, Hindenburg, with the Chancellor, mounted for the first time the car which carried the standard of the Reichspresident. They drove slowly along the Heerstrasse and the Charlottenburger Chaussée towards the Brandenburg Gate. The whole way was lined by jubilant crowds, cheering and waving their hats. The car stopped in front of the Chancellor's palace. Sad memories were awakened when Hindenburg, accompanied by Dr. Luther, climbed the steps. To this palace Hindenburg had hurried from the front ; here had taken place the fateful negotiations of the armistice which had suddenly become necessary ; hither Prince Max had summoned him, in order to discuss with him the means of averting the worst consequences of the German collapse. Now he was brought here again, this time to assist in the reconstruction of the

Fatherland ; to consolidate the hard-struggling German Republic against outside opposition and against subterranean forces. Would he succeed in turning the task to good account ? In his new office, would he do what he has always done : fulfil his duties to the best of his judgment and to the best of his ability ? These were the questions that the veteran soldier anxiously considered.

In the great banqueting hall of the Chancellor's palace the lights glittered. The Chancellor, Dr. Luther, organised the first official dinner for the reception of the new Head of the State. The morning after the "swearing-in," the Reichspresident moved into the time-honoured palace in the Wilhelmstrasse.

The "swearing-in" of Hindenburg was to be an affair of State. Flags flew from all public buildings and from many private houses. The great reception-hall of the Reichstag was richly decorated. Accompanied by the Chancellor, the Reichspresident drove up to the door of the Wallotbau. As Hindenburg stepped on to the platform, all rose from their seats. The President of the Reichstag handed Hindenburg the form of the oath. In a calm, clear, resounding voice, the Reichspresident read :

"I swear by the Almighty and Omniscient God, that I shall devote my strength to the well-being of the German nation, to increase its usefulness, to save it from harm, to preserve its constitution and its laws, to fulfil my duties conscientiously and to do justice to every man. So help me God !"

The Weimar constitution had prepared this form of oath. All who knew Hindenburg, knew that he had taken this oath with the deepest conviction, with the greatest honesty before God. Everyone sensed this in Hindenburg's voice, which was calm and firm, and only

trembled slightly at the end with emotion. There was a great silence. Then Herr Loebe, the president of the Reichstag, made a short speech. For the first time he addressed Hindenburg as "Herr Reichspresident," and asked the members of the Reichstag to join him in welcoming the new Supreme Head of the State.

The speech which the Reichspresident now delivered was approved by the Cabinet and was weighed most carefully, word for word: "Parliament and President belong to one another. Both are the outcome of the votes of the German people. From this common foundation alone, they derive their absolute authority. Both together are the embodiment of the sovereignty of the German people, which, in turn, forms the basis of our entire constitutional existence. That is the deep meaning of the constitution, to which I have just solemnly bound myself by my word of honour. Here and now I say again expressly, that I shall devote myself to the task of reuniting and conciliating our nation, with special devotion. This task will be greatly facilitated if the debates of the parties in this distinguished house are directed, not to the advantage of any one party or of any specialised section of the people, but rather to the truest and most effective advantage of our sorely-tried nation."

The creation of a *Volksgemeinschaft* (National Coalition) formed the central aim of Hindenburg's political views. No Party strife, no struggles for personal aggrandisement, but the distinterested co-operation of all the valued forces of the nation. During the war and also after the collapse Hindenburg had again and again exhorted the nation to unity. Now, as Reichspresident, he felt himself doubly obliged to struggle against party-quarrelling and conflicting interests. Above the individual, above the parties, stood the Fatherland—the German Republic. This was his plain, simple political creed.

The same tenor, the same exhortation to unity at home and abroad, also characterised the Reichspresident's first proclamation to the people: "In this solemn hour I appeal to our whole German nation for co-operation. My office and my aims do not belong to a single class, to a clique, or to a creed; not to one party, but to the entire German nation in all its parts, knit together through hard fate."

More keenly than ever the Reichspresident refused to be a man of one party. He considered it as a personal insult if anyone dared to attempt to get him interested in Party efforts. From the beginning of his entry into office, his aim was that no one Party should dominate the Reichstag. Dr. Meissner, for many years Ebert's Secretary of State, remained in office. The Reichspresident permitted one concession to his private wishes: he chose his son, Lieutenant-Colonel von Hindenburg, as his personal aide-de-camp. He always asked himself the question, whether the policy approved by him, served the whole nation, whether it corresponded to the will of the majority. The word "Volksgemeinschaft" formed the pivot of all his manifestos. When he visited the liberated Rhineland in September, 1925, he thus addressed the cheering masses: "You have, by your actions, shown unquestionably Volksgemeinschaft in times of severe hardship. As I think of this my heart is moved with deep gratitude and with appreciation of all Germans. Let us hope that the German nation will, by a new spirit of brotherly understanding, rise above internal dissension and the disputes of the day, to unity and to a strong common perception of its nationality."

His foreign policy, in so far as the Reichspresident might be responsible for such a policy, Hindenburg outlined to a diplomatic corps which came to congratulate him on May 14th, 1925, in the following words: "He

who is called to the head of a great nation, can know no higher wish than to see the people at peace, working together for the solution of the problems of the world. I appreciate the difficulties which stand in the way, but I live in the hope that they will not be insurmountable. All that I can do, for the solution of the problems before us, shall be done earnestly, conscientiously, and with complete devotion."

He stressed the firm resolve of Germany for a friendly co-operation with foreign powers. When, on January 1st, 1926, the diplomatic corps appeared before him to convey the New Year's greetings of the foreign governments, Hindenburg replied to the senior member, Nuntius Paccelli: "You remember the significant happenings in the sphere of world politics which were enacted in the year which has just closed, in the first months of which this high office was conferred upon me by the will of the German people. With you, Herr Nuntius, I desire and long that the hopes of the nations, and especially the expectations of the still heavily burdened German people, may not be in vain. I pray that from this seed, sown in the honest will to mutual understanding, may soon spring forth the fruits of real and lasting peace. Fully convinced by the living conviction in the heart of mankind, that justice, morality and freedom are the only foundation-stones on which the companionship of the peoples can be built up and developed, the German nation will again work undismayed with all its strength toward the furtherance and safeguarding of peace, which alone can bring progress and improvement to the economics and to the culture of the world. May the new year see our common wishes for a progressive reconciliation and mutual understanding converted into a living reality!"

Reconciliation and mutual understanding between the nations—these were the basis of Hindenburg's foreign

policy. What had become of the fears of the foreign nations, the hopes of the Chauvinists, that the aged Field-Marshal would stir up a war of revenge, would plunge Europe and the world into incalculable political confusion? "He who knows war, desires peace." This aged soldier longed for nothing more urgently than for an ever-closer unity among the nations. The peace policy introduced by Stresemann found in Hindenburg its most powerful supporter. The foreign minister, Stresemann, soon knew what a firm hold he had on the Reichspresident.

The German Nationalists withdrew from the cabinet as a demonstration against the Locarno Treaty. Attempts of the Conservatives were not lacking to sway Hindenburg against Stresemann's "sickly" peace policy, but every effort, every direct and indirect attempt to influence him, was doomed to failure. The keenest advocate of an annexational war policy, had become a warm supporter of peace and of a friendly understanding among the nations. Only gradually did the foreign nations understand the reality of this transformation. At first the foreign Press was astounded and rather sceptical of the genuineness of the declarations of Reichspresident von Hindenburg that he was anxious for peace among the nations. They thought that he aimed at hoodwinking Germany's former enemies. The world was to be lulled into a false security. But all who came into touch with Hindenburg soon felt that hypocrisy was foreign to his character, that he only expressed what he knew to be right. The new Reichspresident soon earned the confidence of foreign powers.

One of the most important American newspapers, the *New York Times*, thus gave its opinion of Hindenburg: "Character is the greatest trait in Hindenburg. Hindenburg commands respect. The essence of his existence is determination and simplicity. Everyone has instinctive

trust in him. If one could give life to a block of granite, then it would resemble Reichspresident Hindenburg. His simple, unaffected manner helped him to fame during the war. His fame as a peacemaker, which followed later, history will perhaps assess even higher than his military fame." An English newspaper declared: "Hindenburg's fame does not rest on what he does and what he says: he is famous because of what he is." "We must admit," stated the *Daily Telegraph* a year after Hindenburg's accession to office, "that most English people were mistaken in their judgment of Hindenburg. He shows the greatest respect for the republican constitution. He has become the bulwark of the Republic. Nothing is more astounding than that to-day the Nationalists treat him as a deserter, and that the Socialists hail him as deliverer. He has given to German policy a measure of constancy and sincerity which it has not had for decades. When a man like Hindenburg puts his seal to the entrance of Germany into the League of Nations, it is something more than a matter of a handsome gesture."

Under the regime of the new Reichspresident, Germany's foreign policy made gratifying progress. These were the years of Stresemann's greatest successes. The Locarno policy was further modified to Germany's advantage. The sun of the Dawes Plan shone in the heavens, a mighty stream of loans flowed into the country from abroad. Unfortunately the money was frequently put to wrong use, often to unproductive objects or to exaggerated nationalisation schemes. The reconstruction of economic life with the help of capital from foreign countries, made rapid progress, often too rapid to succeed. New factories shot up out of the ground. Old factories were restored, without sufficiently considering whether the increased capacity of production corresponded to the marketing possibilities. Far-seeing minds already saw the threatening

reaction. Never yet has there been a lasting boom of the market. Economic crises and times of depression always follow abnormal prosperity. Reparations were not paid from home resources, but with the help of loans. The indebtedness to foreign countries increased, but money was literally thrust upon Germany. It was relatively easy to govern, with this superfluous money. There were no difficulties in the public finances. When the revenue administration sprang a leak, it was always quickly stopped by new foreign loans. Germany became a member of the League of Nations. She was again to enjoy the same rights as other great nations. Stresemann occupied a place in the councils of the nations. True, Germany was not treated with particular deference, but she could certainly throw her weight into the scale. She was regarded again as a great power. In comparison with former years, that meant a considerable improvement. The overwhelming majority of the German people stood firm behind Stresemann's peace policy. Hindenburg was also convinced that Germany could not, and must not, pursue any other foreign policy.

On April 8th, 1926, Hindenburg celebrated his sixtieth anniversary as a soldier. As in the year 1916—on the occasion of his fiftieth anniversary, when he was Commander-in-Chief of the East Prussian army, in the headquarters at Kovno—he now stood once again under the old flags of the Prussian regiments. Foreign countries also sent their congratulations to the Reichspresident. The day was celebrated with great military pomp, with tattoos and torchlights, with the participation of the Reichswehr and of the old regiments and war associates. The Conservatives in the whole country took advantage of this occasion to indulge in rather flamboyant patriotic speeches. But foreign countries were not misled by this military pomp. On the contrary, the foreign newspapers

stated that Hindenburg was the most faithful guardian of the Republican constitution. The *Manchester Guardian* declared that Hindenburg had shown the greatest loyalty to the Republican constitution, although he did not like it. He had always observed the laws of the Republic to which he had pledged himself, even though in his innermost thoughts he did not agree with it. "We cannot like or unreservedly admire Hindenburg's typical Prussian personality, but we must acknowledge that his person shows a sincerity and dignity which has won universal recognition. Under his Presidency the German people will experience no unpleasant surprises. They know that, and therefore they trust him."

That Hindenburg, this aged, enthusiastic soldier, as President also of the defence forces, felt the greatest interest in encouraging them in every direction, goes without saying. But he also kept strictly to the limits of the treaties made with our former opponents. He always advocated, however, the policy of making the most of the military resources which the Versailles Treaty had allowed us, were all the more prominent. Only the latest inventions of military science, only the best and most modern war material should be secured for the Reichswehr, he contended. The Reichswehr was not a police force, he said, and not, as was often asserted by the Social Democrats, intended only to protect the constitution in extreme urgency against revolutionary attacks. According to the view of the Reichspresident, it must also uphold the traditions of the old army and, in case of need, defend Germany against outside enemies. When the Reichstag desired to economise and make reductions in the army estimates, Hindenburg intervened. Apart from the Social Democrats and the Communists, the majority of Parliament under Hindenburg's leadership had showed themselves inclined to approve the estimates. Even the Social Democratic

party withdrew its opposition against the Class B. armoured cruisers. This party, since its participation in the government of the country, had, on the whole, developed more and more into a national party.

Hindenburg, as Reichspresident, also frequently visited the great military manœuvres, travelled to Döberitz to inspect the troops, and never missed the Reichswehr manœuvres. In spite of all the physical strain they entailed they were for him days of recreation. Hour after hour he watched the movements of the troops, himself intervening occasionally, but always with tact and restraint. In consideration of the strained financial position of the Reich, it was necessary for the Reichswehr to practice the greatest economy. The manœuvres were frequently on a strictly limited scale. Naturally this did not please Hindenburg, but he was much too sensible to oppose the necessary economy measures of the Minister of Finance.

On his accession to office, Hindenburg issued the following address to the nation's defence forces: "With pride and joy I salute the army and the navy. Through hard discipline, and loyalty in the smallest details of your work advance to triumph and success! The basis of your strength rests on the old sense of duty and of order, but your service belongs to the present and to the future; to the people and to the State. Be loyal to your oath and to the tasks to which the constitution calls you." The generals and admirals of the forces were received by him the day after his accession to office, with the following words: "This small German force stands to-day untouched by the struggles of parties and political opinions. It is supported by its sense of duty towards the great traditions of our old national army. May you further succeed in making the German Reichswehr the effective instrument of an

honourable will to peace, which alone it must be ! ”

On the occasion of the celebration of his sixtieth anniversary as a soldier, Hindenburg replied in the following words to the congratulations of the Minister of the Reichswehr, Dr. Gessler : “ You will not blame me, as an old soldier, if I to-day, surrounded by these venerable historic flags, under which I have spent the greater part of my life, recall to memory the proud old army in sad, painful remembrance. It was a national army, which had not only honourably fulfilled its object in protecting the Fatherland, but, furthermore, it was an educational establishment for our entire people ; a high school of devotion to duty and of love of the Fatherland. What we have lost in that army we can only fully realise when it is no longer with us.”

On this occasion he also reminded the military attachés who came to congratulate him, of the necessity for agreement and the sinking of differences. “ Comradeship, as we have always understood it,” declared Hindenburg, “ means agreement and unity. Just now, when our people are in danger of splitting up and weakening in daily conflicts of a political and denominational kind, we are in dire need of this unity. We can only become great and strong again, if we unite in such a spirit of agreement.”

On the national day of mourning, 1926, Hindenburg couched his sentiments in the following noble words : “ At the graves of our fallen, who sacrificed themselves for us all, discord must be silent. We are admonished against such discord by the memory of Germany’s sufferings, and by the sacred sacrifice of those who fell in the war. They died that Germany might live. The strength of the German people will grow out of that sacrifice.”

Hindenburg was never a bureaucrat. When he, in

his capacity as Major, came into close touch for the first time with the punctilious administrative mechanism in the War Ministry, he was shocked at the pedantry and narrow-mindedness of the bureaucrats. To him, the man of action, the preciseness and red-tapism of the painfully exact officials, appeared strange. Nevertheless, he frankly acknowledged the outstanding qualities of the German Civil Service, which worked indeed in a cumbersome manner, but was extraordinarily reliable and fair-dealing. Also, as Reichspresident, he was always conscious of the fact that the German Civil Service had, by its unselfish and devoted labour, contributed much to assure public order and unity to the Reich in the years immediately following the collapse. And he knew that it was essential that this spirit of devotion to duty and to integrity must be maintained.

On a visit to the Supreme Court of Justice in Leipzig, Hindenburg said : "Justice is the foundation and soul of the State. The higher the waves of political and economical strife surge, the firmer must be established the foundation of an impartial justice, which, untouched by the passions of that strife, maintains law and order. Therefore it is more than ever important, in these times of divergent political opinions, to maintain a high standard of justice and to ward off every attack on its independence."

Hindenburg was a devout Christian. Almost regularly he attended Divine service at Trinity Church to which he belonged. At one time Schleiermacher preached his famous sermons in this church. Sunday visitors could nearly always see the Reichspresident listening attentively to the sermon, in the semi-darkness of this small, simple place of worship in the neighbourhood of the Wilhelmsplatz.

Although a strict Protestant, Hindenburg treated other religious bodies with complete understanding and

respect. At a reception of representatives of the Evangelical, Catholic and Jewish bodies on the day after his accession to office, he said : " Your declaration that you are anxious to devote your energy in your capacity as representative religious beliefs of the German peoples in the maintenance of the State and to the reconstruction of our beloved Fatherland, fills me with the greatest satisfaction. I know full well what great efforts the religious societies have made towards the shaping of the spiritual life of the nation. I give you the renewed assurance that I respect with equal conscientiousness all denominations and views, and will always protect the spirit of our Volksgemeinschaft. May the conciliatory attitude in the ranks of your churches and communities always find a corresponding mutual respect and co-operation ! "

The same request also formed the fundamental note of his New-Year message in 1927 : " For the recovery of our nation, the first essential is that in all vital questions of our nation, the one mind and the combined comprehensive strength of all the masses of our people should be brought into play. Therefore, on this day I urge all our people, all parties and all professions, not to place differences of opinion and conflicting interests in the foreground, but to be guided in the first place by the consideration of the common interests of the Fatherland. These interests are not served by stressing the importance of its separate sections, but by all parties acting conjointly. One thing must bridge over all personal differences and unite all Germans, namely, the concern for Germany and its future."

Unfortunately, these noble words found the poorest response among those very circles which had elected Hindenburg as Reichspräsident. With the growth of the Radical Parties, antagonisms became sharper and sharper,

more and more unbridgeable. An unreasoning anti-Semitic hatred developed in the nation. That was not the spirit which would bring health to a sick nation ; that was not the spirit which the old soldier, Hindenburg, as head of the State, preached.

CHAPTER XVII

HINDENBURG AND HITLER

NOTHING was so typical of the policy of Reichspresident Paul von Hindenburg as his admonition: "No adventures!" So long as Hindenburg stood at the head of the Reich, Germany undertook no adventures in its domestic or international policy. Even after the death of Stresemann, the course taken by that great diplomat and sincere patriot was continued. All who expected Hindenburg to take specific steps in domestic and international politics, were bitterly disappointed. No matter which way the wind blew, no matter how high the political passions rose, Hindenburg remained faithful to what his conscience recognised as the right thing. That Germany had not suffered even more acutely from the serious disorders and difficulties of the past six years, that the many mistakes and blunders of the different administrations did not lead to a catastrophe, was undoubtedly due, to a great extent, to the honest, unflinching attitude of its President. It was always Hindenburg's endeavour to withhold his support from any domestic or international political undertaking if the issue was in doubt. His advisers did their utmost to keep fomentors of trouble at a distance from the Reichspresident. But they could not, of course, keep the Reichspresident completely isolated. Even his responsible advisers, however, were not always right, and then they met with decided opposition from Hindenburg.

An amusing little anecdote is told in Berlin—*se non è vero, è ben trovato* - ("if not true, it is a good story, at any rate"). At the beginning of his term of office his immediate subordinates were frequently astonished because in the course of discussing some particular issue, he would suddenly put some very unpleasant questions. How did the Reichspresident know about the ins and outs of everything? He could not have gathered this knowledge from the newspapers and newspaper-cuttings which were placed before him. The problem was solved quite by chance. He was always an early riser, and as Reichspresident he kept to this habit. In the mornings he went into the park, where he could stroll about undisturbed for a quarter of an hour before breakfast. One day, somebody who followed him for some reason or other, saw how Hindenburg first of all looked round on all sides to see that nobody was watching him, then went quickly over to a small gate in the garden wall, took a key from his pocket, opened the gate, took a packet of newspapers from an old newspaper-woman who was waiting there; and then with his booty under his arm, returned quickly into the palace. One can believe that he would be quite capable of that, for he did not like anything to be concealed from him, and always preferred to form his own opinion about everything.

Shortly after his election a new Disarmament Note was received in Berlin from our former opponents. In an abandoned shed the Control Commission discovered some unserviceable gun-barrels. Furthermore, in the opinion of the Commission of Control, the dismantling of the eastern forts had not been carried out with sufficient thoroughness. The members of the Right pricked up their ears. They looked forward with pleasure to the sharp retort which, under the inspiration of the new Reichspresident, would be despatched to the former

enemy. But they were disappointed. Under Hindenburg's Presidency, a meeting of the Cabinet decided to send a note to Paris, moderate in tone and contents. If, under the Social Democrat, Ebert, and the peace-politician Stresemann—who had “allowed himself to be completely squashed” by Briand—our diplomatic notes were couched in such a “defeatist” tone, that surprised no one. But something different was expected from Hindenburg. Yet the “Catastrophe” politicians were to be still further disappointed. Under the new Reichspresident, Stresemann conducted his foreign policy as before. The “disgraceful” Locarno Treaty was signed. In anger, the German Nationalists, who had chosen Hindenburg as their leader, left the Government. The Foreign Minister, who had previously striven against the candidature of the Field-Marshal for the Presidency, now acknowledged in Hindenburg the surest supporter of his policy. Still the Conservatives did not give up hope. One day Hindenburg would surely understand, and drop Stresemann; all the more since the German foreign policy suffered various setbacks after Locarno. But again they were wrong. In spite of everything, the Reichspresident adhered to the course followed hitherto, as any other policy would, in his opinion, have damaged German interests.

After Locarno the estrangement between the German Nationalists and Hindenburg became much more marked. Probably the Reichspresident felt it rather bitterly when his old supporters turned away from him and from the policy which he recognised as the right one. But he did not think of running after them nor of deviating from his course. After the resignation of the German Nationalists the Government machine ran substantially smoother. Without any effort on the part of Hindenburg, a closer understanding between him and the Social Democrats gradually developed. The Republican Parties and

associations gradually came to see that Hindenburg, loyal to his oath, could hold his own as the guardian of the constitution. Suspicion vanished. Those who had strongly opposed Hindenburg's candidature during the Presidential election, were at first sceptical, but very soon they, too, realised that he was right in the attitude he adopted.

Although during the first years of Hindenburg's presidency there was a decided economic boom, there were some serious domestic and international crises. Still, owing to the wave of industrial prosperity, the taxgatherers reaped a rich harvest, so that in all public funds important balances were in hand. Most people forgot that Germany had lost the war, that a great part of her substance was consumed, that in spite of everything, we were an unarmed nation, and were not able to afford luxury. But even foreign countries placed complete trust in Germany and were keen to invest their money with us. Reconstruction made rapid progress. Unemployment decreased. The rationalisation of German industries provided many branches of industry with large orders. Shares advanced. Everywhere money was easily and quickly earned.

But for all that, political squabbling was rife. Cabinets fell as the result of trifling disputes. Emergency decrees were not yet necessary. New Governments were formed. It was, of course, always more difficult to form a new Cabinet, but ultimately it could be done. The Reichs-president himself very rarely intervened. He called the Party leaders and appealed to their consciences. He pointed out that a Government could not be carried on if there was no cohesion. Where, he asked them, was their united will? Where was the co-operation of all the forces which were prepared to work together for reconstruction? Consideration for the well-being of the Fatherland must be put first. If they were constantly working against each

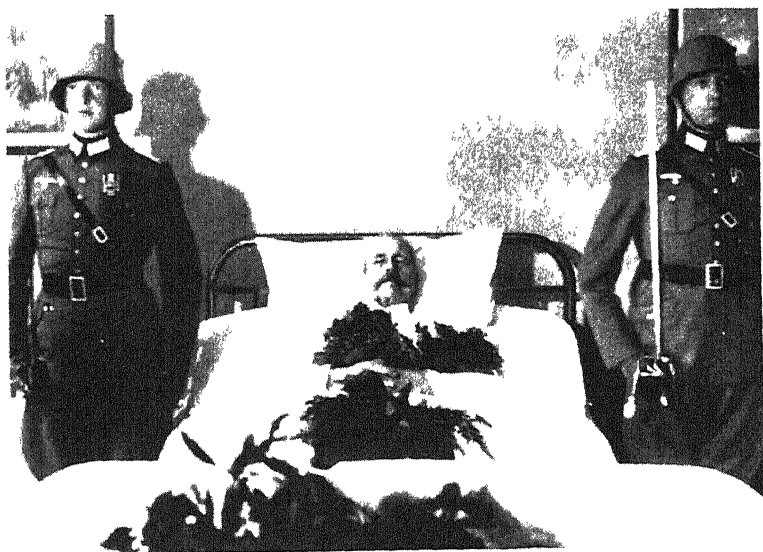
other, instead of endeavouring to unite on a common basis, there would be no progress.

The Party leaders understood that the old soldier, this non-political general, was fundamentally right. Again they consulted together in the Reichstag and endeavoured to find a solution. They did not wish to be summoned again before the Reichspräsident, to receive a second lecture.

When the Luther Cabinet fell at Christmas, 1926, Hindenburg advised the Social Democrats to allow Luther to make another attempt. Ultimately they gave in and agreed to the formation of a new Luther Cabinet. On an average these Cabinet crises were repeated at least once a year. Even the new Luther Cabinet fell, owing to the flag-order, in consequence of which the German black-white-red flag was to fly in future from the German Embassies abroad. That was indeed too much for the Social Democrats. Hindenburg tried in vain to protect Luther, but the Republican Party took the flag question very seriously. The Marx Cabinet replaced the Luther Cabinet. When in 1927 the Social Democrats made a venomous attack on the Reichswehr, the domestic political situation reached such a critical point that the Marx Cabinet also fell. Hindenburg was distressed by the behaviour of the Social Democrats. Revelations about the alleged connections between the Reichswehr and the Red Army were bound to make difficulties for German foreign policy. A Cabinet of the Centre Party, which found itself in the minority, and must in every case seek support either from the Right or the Left, was no longer considered possible by the Reichspräsident. Luther's policy had already shown an eternal swinging first to the Right and then to the Left. The Government worked its economic and social policies with the German Nationalists and its foreign policy with the Social Democrats. The first Marx



PRESIDENT HINDENBURG BROADCASTING HIS NEW YEAR'S
ADDRESS IN 1932



AT THE LYING IN STATE OF PRESIDENT HINDENBURG
 WITH THE DEAD PRESIDENT

Cabinet also tried the same game, but the Social Democrats torpedoed it with their revelations about negotiations which were alleged to be proceeding between Russia and Germany.

At last Hindenburg decided to clear up the state of affairs in domestic politics. In his view the German Nationalists were capable of government. He told them that they must now show what they were able to do in a responsible position. But they came to no agreement. The old familiar parliamentary bargaining dragged on for weeks. Then Hindenburg summoned the leaders of the Centre parties, and after that those of the German Nationalists. The Centre did not trust the Right. But Hindenburg's earnest appeal induced the Central Party leaders to put aside their differences and to try to pull with the German Nationals. Hindenburg was fully aware of his responsibility, for ultimately the Reichspresident appointed the Chancellor and at the latter's suggestion, the Cabinet ministers. After long consideration he entrusted with the formation of a Government Chancellor Marx, his former opponent at the Presidential election, who was then supported by the united Central parties and by those of the Left. For Hindenburg, this former rivalry was no ground for objection. The old Party leaders shook their heads. Such things had never before existed in the domestic political life of Germany. Where was Party loyalty, if to-day a coalition could be formed with this, and to-morrow with that Party? To-day the Centre Party governed with the Left; to-morrow, by order of the Reichspresident, they would be marching together with the German Nationalists.

But Hindenburg's letter to Marx was to the point. His words were sincere and definite: "I hereby direct you, Herr Chancellor, to undertake the formation of a Government on the basis of a majority of the Centre

parties of the Reichstag, with the utmost despatch. At the same time I appeal to the parties of the Reichstag to put on one side personal ideas and differences of opinion, in the interests of the Fatherland ; to form an alliance under your leadership and to join forces behind a Government which is determined to work, not for and not against a single party, but faithfully for the constitution and for the well-being of the Fatherland. The new Government ought, even if it does not contain any representatives of the Left, nevertheless, to undertake the special duty of watching over the interests of the working classes, in the same way that they look after the other needs of the State."

No German Chief-of-State had ever before spoken to the parties of the Reichstag in this manner. The appeal had its effect. After a few days the new Cabinet was formed. A German National, owner of a manorial estate and retired District Administrator, Herr von Keudell, was appointed Minister of the Interior. But immediately a political feud began. The Social Democrats made bitter attacks on Herr von Keudell, who, in his capacity as an estate-owner, was reproached with having supported the Kapp *putsch*. In the Reichstag, photographs were passed from hand to hand, showing Herr von Keudell standing in front of his manor-house surrounded by members of an illegally armed organisation. The left wing of the Centre Party also became suspicious. The entire Left went into opposition. But Hindenburg wanted to keep the Cabinet of the Right. Again there were long conversations with the Party leaders, again the Reichs-president exhorted them to bury the old hatchet, to direct their attention to the future and to raise no further dissensions.

Generally speaking, the Reichs-president, on principle, intervened as little as possible in Germany's internal and

foreign affairs. This wise moderation was recognised by all parties, and lent special emphasis to Hindenburg's words, whenever he broke his customary reserve. Once Hindenburg departed from this principle and allowed himself to be drawn into an electoral struggle. The plebiscite regarding the grants to the Princes gave rise to intense feeling. Expropriation was emphatically championed by the Left. The opposition saw in the expropriation law, however, an attack on what appeared to them as sacred private property. The leader in this fight against expropriation to the Princes, was the ex-Kaiser's former Minister of the Interior, von Loebell. It was Loebell who also induced the Reichspresident to write him a letter in which he expressed himself as being strongly opposed to the expropriation. This letter expressed the private opinion of the Reichspresident, and was not intended for publication. But Herr von Loebell had hardly received it when its contents were known all over the country. Copies of the letter were circulated in millions to all sections of the population. The Conservatives considered this an unpardonable misuse of the name of the Supreme Head of the State. With all parties it was an unwritten law, that the Reichspresident should not be drawn into political struggles. Large numbers of the population rose in revolt against the publication of this letter. It was made use of in the referendum campaign as a means of influencing the voters ; but would have been better left alone. People were not accustomed to such intervention on the part of Hindenburg. This letter, the cause of so many disputes, was as follows : " That I, who have spent my life in the service of the Prussian kings and the German Kaiser, feel this plebiscite first of all as a great injustice, and also as an exhibition of a regrettable lack of traditional sentiment and of great ingratitude, I do not need to explain to you any further. The

very foundation of a constitutional state is the legal recognition of property. The expropriation proposal offends against moral principles and the principles of justice."

That Hindenburg advocated this opinion, is, in accordance with his whole upbringing, quite natural; but it would have been better had he not given expression to it in his capacity of Reichspresident.

Fifteen million voters, men and women, who likewise stood on the ground of morality and justice, voted against the Princes. but with a bare majority, the bill became law. In the Reichstag the Social Democrats entered very emphatic protests against the Reichspresident's influence in the election. The storm, however, soon subsided. Hindenburg had only given expression to his opinion in a private letter. The blame lay with those who had misused this expression of opinion.

But apart from this unfortunate incident, throughout the Reich the so-called "Hindenburg course" was followed, that is to say, that the political programme at home and abroad was conducted with considerable restraint. So the year 1927 passed without any momentous developments.

The Tannenberg Memorial was to be dedicated. Nearly the whole nation seemed to be gathered on the battlefield. Hindenburg appeared at the head of a cavalry regiment. Numerous black, white and red flags were flying together with the Prussian colours from the turrets and battlements of the mighty monument, while among these only an occasional black, red and gold Weimar flag floated. The Field-Marshal stood on this former scene of bloodshed, not as the hero of Tannenberg, but as supreme head of the State. And not as Field-Marshal, but as Reichspresident, did he proclaim to the listening world: "The accusation, that Germany was guilty of the greatest of all wars, we,

the whole German nation in every walk of life, unanimously reject. Not envy, hatred or lust of conquest, placed the weapons of war in our hands. Germany is ready at any time, to prove this before an impartial tribunal ! ”

Telegraph and telephone immediately flashed the Reichspresident's speech throughout the world. Does the German Government intend to reopen the question of war guilt, the foreign nations anxiously asked. By an overwhelming majority, the German people were convinced, however, that they alone were not to blame for the war. In spite of the many mistakes and follies of the former Kaiser's Government, even Wilhelm II himself had never wanted the war. As Baron von Eckardstein rightly emphasised : “ In consequence of our political stupidity we have in fact actually played the role of hireling to England. . . . That Wilhelm II had ever at any time seriously wanted a war, appeared to those who knew his fundamentally timid nature, to be very doubtful.”

Although all parties in the Reichstag agreed that the Treaty of Versailles was based upon an extorted confession of guilt, and although many leaders of thought abroad had given public expression to this opinion, the Government did not consider the time was yet ripe for the repudiation of war-guilt. The peace policy, which had begun so hopefully, would be endangered by so rash an act. The Reichspresident had not made his speech extempore. In order to gratify the great masses of German Nationalists as far as statesmanlike prudence permitted, the Government had requested the Reichspresident to repudiate, in vigorous terms, on the Tannenberg battlefield, the accusation of Germany's guilt.

On October 2nd, 1927, Germany celebrated a national holiday. On that day Reichspresident Paul von Hindenburg was eighty years old. The Government did everything possible to pay Hindenburg the highest honour.

Many months before, collections for the Hindenburg Fund for the relief of the suffering war-victims were instituted. The representatives of the old Officers' Corps were assembled in the spacious banqueting-salons of the Berlin Zoological Gardens under the leadership of Field-Marshal von Mackensen, and even in the tiniest village inns, the health of the venerable field-marshal was drunk by hundreds of thousands. As a special honour the Government presented the Reichspresident with an exact replica of the celebrated five-hundred-piece table-service of Frederick the Great. The Reichsbank struck coins with the image of Hindenburg, for circulation.

The German industrial and agricultural bodies had acquired the ancient family estate of Neudeck from Hindenburg's sister-in-law and presented it to him as a birthday gift. The old manor had been demolished, and in its place stood a magnificent new building in which the Reichspresident could rest after the strain of his official duties.

It is unnecessary to go into details of subsequent political happenings, as they deal with Cabinet reshufflings and party squabbles which pained Hindenburg and gave him a lot of worry, but which really did not appeal in the slightest to a man whose interests were centred in the welfare of the Fatherland as a whole. When the National Socialists and the German Nationalists tried to induce him to dismiss Brüning, he stubbornly refused, with the result that he had to face the full fury of their wrath. They now demanded that Hindenburg himself should resign. The only reason for his not complying with their demand was that he was convinced that, as he was not concerned with party bickerings, it was his duty to remain in office until the country had recovered from its internal maladies.

On New Year's Day, 1932, Hindenburg made an appeal to the common sense of the world on the issues

which his Chancellor had already strenuously advocated. "The terrible sacrifices that we are making," he said, "justify us in appealing before the whole world against obstacles being placed in the way of our national recovery by the imposition of intolerable burdens. In the question of disarmament, too, Germany must not be debarred from her undoubted rights. Our claim to equal security with other nations is so clear that it cannot be contested!"

A few days after the President's message, Brüning announced that the condition of Germany made it impossible for him to continue "reparations" payments. The French national Press greeted this declaration with a spate of invective and threats of enforcing payments, but Italy, England and America weighed the statements issued by the President and by Brüning dispassionately. A new conference was summoned to deal with the joint questions of reparations and economic conditions. Brüning headed the German deputation. The negotiations that ensued showed clearly that the period of payment of tribute was coming to a close.

But Germany now had to face the menace of domestic troubles. The period of Hindenburg's tenure of the presidency of the Reich was drawing to a close. Brüning endeavoured through the medium of personal negotiations with Hitler and Hugenberg to arrange for an extension of Hindenburg's term of office, but they declined, on constitutional grounds, to consider the proposal. They insisted that a new election should be held.

In response to pressure brought to bear upon him by large and influential sections of the people, Hindenburg agreed to offer himself again as a candidate. He would have infinitely preferred to spend the evening of his life in Neudeck, far away from the turmoil of political wranglings, but his sense of duty commanded him to obey the summons of his people.

"After giving serious thought to the matter," he stated in an address issued to the people in the middle of February, 1932, "I have decided from a sense of my responsibility for the fate of our Fatherland, to present myself as a candidate for a further term of office. The fact that the demand that I should seek a further term of office has been made not by a political party, but by large sections of the general public, makes me regard it as my duty to respond to their call. Should I be elected, I shall continue to serve the Fatherland to the best of my ability faithfully and conscientiously, in order to secure freedom and justice abroad for it, as well as harmonious co-operation and progress at home. And if I am not elected, I shall have saved myself from the reproach of having deliberately abandoned my post when my country was in direst need. In my view there is only one genuine national goal—the fusion of all sections of our people for their fight for existence, the selfless devotion of every German to the stern struggle for the maintenance of our nation."

A large section of patriotic Germans still fervently hoped that the nation would be spared the unnecessary ordeal of a presidential election. But the Right would not entertain the idea of allowing Brüning to remain in office as Chancellor of the Reich. The Press bureau of the Nazi Party declared that they were determined to abolish the system of government that had been introduced on November 9th, 1918, and with the end of the Brüning Cabinet there would be an end of that system. Furthermore, in view of the political situation, the German Nationalists could not vote this time for Hindenburg, as they had done in 1925. And so the President of the Reich entered the lists against Hitler and against Dusterberg, whom the Steel Helmets and the German Nationalists respectively had championed, and against Thälmann,

whom the Communists had pledged themselves to support. The venerable President had to endure a lot of insults from the very electors who had previously supported him so staunchly.

On March 15th the result was announced. The poll totalled 37,660,000 votes, of which 18,500,000 were cast for Hindenburg, and he had beaten Adolf Hitler, his only competitor of any account, by 7,000,000 votes. Nevertheless, as he had failed to attain an absolute majority by about 200,000 votes, it was found necessary to hold another election on April 10th. This time Hindenburg secured an absolute majority, nearly 20,000,000 votes having been cast for him.

This election further deepened the gulf which divided the German people, and made the prospect of that internal solidarity which was essential for the strengthening of Germany's position in dealing with the other powers, seem more and more remote. It was soon obvious that the Brüning Cabinet would not last much longer. Shortly before his departure to Geneva to attend the Disarmament Conference, an emergency decree for the suppression of the S.S. and the S.A. throughout the whole Reich was passed. This was a coercive measure of a type which has never, throughout the course of history, succeeded in stamping out any great popular movement.

Brüning found himself forced to resign on May 30th, 1932, and Hindenburg was determined to make another effort to stand by the Constitution, and to form a new Government in accordance with parliamentary procedure. He interviewed the leaders of the various parties, among them Hitler, whom he now met for the first time. Doctor Goebbels contended that after the fall of the Brüning Cabinet, the National Socialists were entitled to assume control of the Reich. They would only consent to a coalition government on condition of the carrying out of

their programme in full. The President declined to see eye to eye with Dr. Goebbels, and asked Franz von Papen to form a Cabinet. With a view to appeasing the steadily increasing unrest among the Nazis, the recent ban on the S.S. and S.A. was rescinded. But even this step failed to end the intestine troubles of the country. It was regarded rather as a tacit admission of the Government's impotence. The acts of violence committed by the rowdy elements attached to the various political parties became such a menace to the public peace that emergency decrees banning public meetings and processions were passed.

The von Papen Government's achievements at Lausanne and Geneva were not calculated to appease the growing restlessness of the German people. Another General Election was held on July 31st, which resulted in a enormous increase in the power of the National Socialists, who polled nearly 14,000,000 votes, and secured 230 seats in the Reichstag. The Communists, too, increased their strength. But despite the decided victory of the National Socialists at the polls, the von Papen Government still remained in office.

The internal political situation became more menacing from day to day. The civil war which had been raging for several months in an underhand manner was threatening to develop into open conflict. To combat the ruthless brutality of the terrorists, special courts with power to inflict the death penalty were established. The efforts of the Chancellor to strengthen his position by the inclusion of the National Socialists in his Cabinet proved abortive, despite the fact that Hindenburg did his utmost to effect this solution of the problem. Hitler declined to permit representatives of his Party to accept seats in the von Papen Cabinet, and demanded for himself full control of the Government and of the administration of the Reich. Turbulent scenes ensued in the Reichstag. Things came

to such a pass that once again an appeal to the country became imperative. November 2nd was fixed as the date for another General Election.

General von Schleicher, the Minister of War, was the strongest member of the von Papen Cabinet. He took a bold stand in foreign politics, and threatened to leave the League of Nations and to refuse to attend any further sessions of the Disarmament Conference if Germany was not granted the rights to which she was entitled. His bold stand aroused fierce indignation in Paris, but von Schleicher stuck to his guns. In due course the German Government announced that they would not send a representative to the meeting of the Disarmament Conference which was to open on September 21st.

The result of the General Election, which was announced on November 6th, showed a reverse for the National Socialists. They lost thirty-five seats, fifteen of which went to the Communists, who were now represented by one hundred deputies in the Reichstag. This election, too, had failed to lead to the definite strengthening of any of the warring parties, and so the von Papen Cabinet took office again on November 18th.

Hindenburg held a series of conferences again with the various parties, and displayed extraordinary energy and initiative for a man now in his eighty-sixth year. Hugenburg, Kaas, Dingeldey and Hitler were in turn summoned before the President. His interview with Hitler, which was private, lasted for more than an hour. A few days later Hitler, accompanied by Göring and Doctor Frick, called on Hindenburg and informed him that his Party could only co-operate with a government which was led by himself. To many this intransigent attitude seemed utterly incomprehensible. They failed to realise that the Nazis were in reality not a political party; they were a movement, or, more strictly, a school of philosophy.

It would be illogical for them to accept any compromise.

Hindenburg now asked Hitler to state the conditions under which a party led by him would secure a definite majority in the Reichstag. He also emphasised the stipulation that the composition of any Cabinet formed by Hitler should be subject to his approval. He also retained for himself the right of appointing the Minister of War and the Foreign Minister, and refused to sanction any alteration of Article 48 of the Constitution of the Reich. Finally, he asked Hitler to give him a detailed outline of the economic programme which he had in mind.

"You know," said Hindenburg in his statement to Hitler on November 21st, "that I represent the principle of a 'Präsidential' Cabinet. By that I mean a cabinet the head of which is not a party leader, but a man who is above party consideration, and that I place special confidence in a man of this type. You have stated that you could only guarantee the support of your movement for a cabinet led by yourself, the leader of the party. Now if I accept your point of view, I must insist that such a cabinet as you contemplate will have the support of the majority of the deputies in the Reichstag. For this reason I ask you, as the leader of the strongest party, to state whether, and under what conditions, you could secure for a government led by you a safe working majority in the Reichstag with a definite workable programme on which you were all agreed."

Hitler said that he feared that he could not agree with the President's terms, and put forward on his own account the following proposals :

1. The President of the Reich is to ask me to submit to him within forty-eight hours of his commissioning me

for the task, a concise programme of the domestic, foreign, economic and political measures which I propose to carry through. After he has approved of this programme, I shall submit a list of ministers within twenty-four hours to the President.

2. In addition to other members of the government for the time being who are to be taken over under my ministry, I shall propose to the President to appoint as Minister of War General von Schleicher, whom I know, and who enjoys the confidence of the President.

3. The President will then appoint me as Chancellor of the Reich, and will confirm the appointment of the ministers recommended by me, and approved by him.

4. The President will commission me to undertake the preliminary constitutional steps for putting this Cabinet on a working basis, and for this purpose he will give me those full powers which have never been refused to parliamentary Chancellors of the Reich in such critical periods as the present.

5. I promise that I shall devote all my personal energy and all the energy of my movement to the restoration of our Fatherland.

In a letter written in courteous but very firm terms, the President assured Herr Hitler that his door would be always open to him, but that he was obliged to reject the proposals which he had submitted to him. The President contended that a "Präsidential" Cabinet led by Herr Hitler must automatically evolve into a dictatorship by a party, entailing all the consequences of such a dictatorship. The President pointed out that regard for his oath and conscientious objections would not permit him to accept responsibility for such consequences.

Although these negotiations proved abortive, they were

the means of bringing into close touch with each other those two men who had in common an ardent interest in the welfare of Germany, and of inspiring in their hearts a feeling of mutual respect and confidence.

The discussions between the Reichspresident and the other Party leaders soon proved the impossibility of a parliamentary solution. It was difficult for Hindenburg to part with von Papen, to whom he felt bound by ties of friendship. But Papen could not hope for a majority in the Reichstag. The photograph of himself which the President presented to von Papen on his departure was inscribed : " I had a comrade."

" It is hard to be obliged to part with men with whom one has worked. It is the most difficult duty of the head of the State." From these words, which the Reichspresident spoke a few weeks later to Rolf Brandt, it is possible to estimate the distress which the resignation of his fellow-worker cost him. As successor to von Papen, General von Schleicher was entrusted with the formation of a cabinet, and as early as December 5th the new Cabinet received the sanction of the Reichspresident. Chancellor von Schleicher also retained the offices of Reichswehr Minister and Commissioner of Prussia.

No doubt the Foreign Minister, Baron von Neurath, achieved an important success at Geneva. At last the Five-Power Conference acknowledged in principle Germany's right to equality, and Germany was enabled to again take part in the Disarmament Conference. But the high hopes which in many circles had been placed in General von Schleicher as the coming strong man were disappointed. Undoubtedly efforts were taken to assist agriculture in order to check severe hardship, but the crucial problem, the fight against unemployment and economic stress, came no nearer to solution. Schleicher also suppressed Party quarrelling and internal political terrorism. He was

obviously, however, not the strong, reserved personality of great resolutions, but rather, as Bade expressed it, "a satellite nature, which always received its brilliance and illuminating power from the other stars of its constellation." Rumours were spread abroad, supported by the military, that Schleicher inclined to the idea of a military dictatorship. Many looked forward to the re-assembling of the Reichstag at the end of January, filled with anxiety. But the National Socialists were full of hope. "If Schleicher fails, then it is our turn," wrote Dr. Goebbels in his diary.

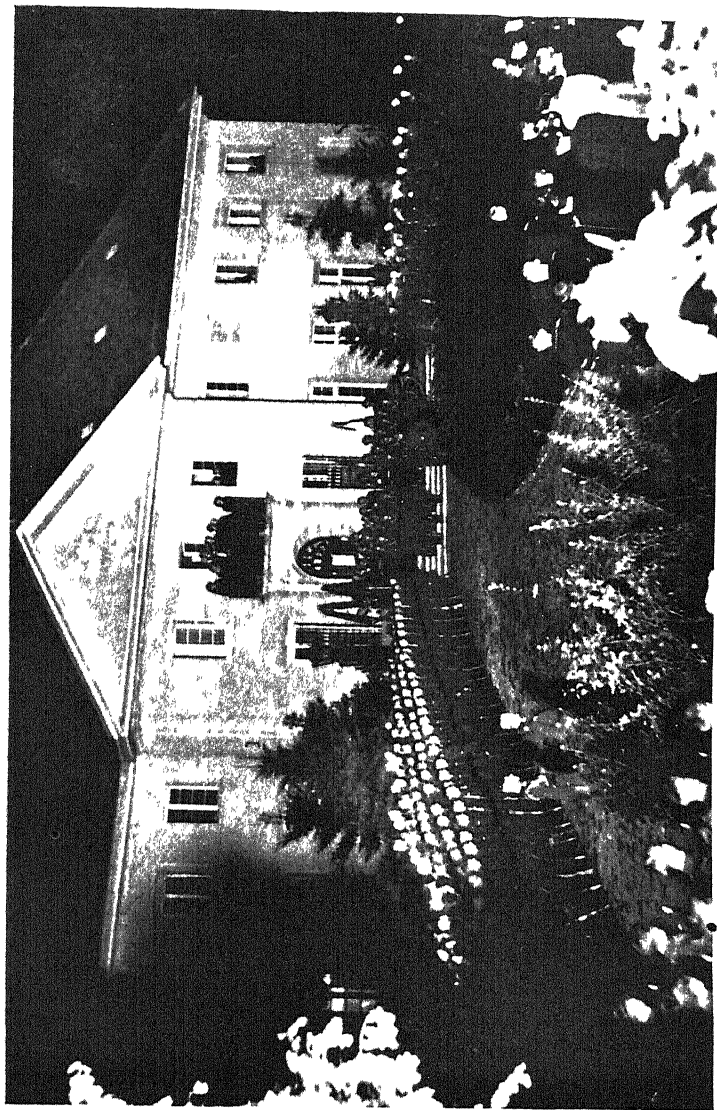
The uncertainty of the situation caused Herr von Papen, in agreement with the Reichspresident and the Chancellor, to discuss with Adolf Hitler, at Baron Schroder's house in Cologne, the possibility of the creation of a great national united front.

It was a hard blow for the Schleicher Cabinet when the National Socialists turned away from Schleicher. In view of the coming Reichstag sitting, the General explained to the President that the Government could only uphold their programme if the Reichspresident placed the order for dissolution at his disposal. Again Hindenburg was obliged to make a difficult decision. He wanted to keep Schleicher, for it became clearer every day that if Schleicher fell, only Hitler came into question for the post of Chancellor, and Hitler made it clear that he would not be satisfied with a partial authority. The hope that Hitler would be put off with the post of Vice-Chancellor was therefore vain. But no Government was able any longer to withstand the opposition of the National Socialists. A military dictatorship would mean civil war. Moreover, the people had acknowledged Hitler by an overwhelming majority, and for the Reichspresident there was only one rule—"Right and Duty."

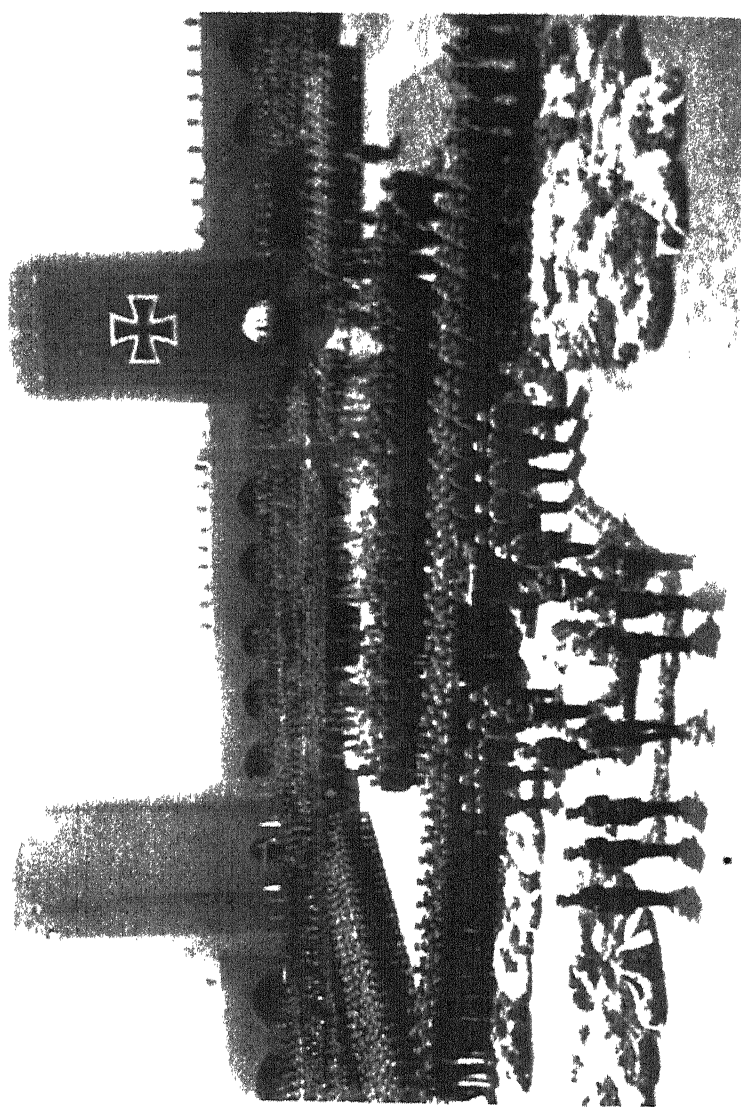
"I have taken an oath," thus Hindenburg expressed

himself to Rolf Brandt, "and I shall keep it. You see, I can do nothing else but say this again and again. Oh, if only they would understand me; if they would only be united. Surely it is better if seriously-minded men shake hands, rather than adopt a threatening attitude to one another. You cannot love the Fatherland only on Sundays, as it were. You must always hold it in high esteem. You must hold it in such high esteem that you even forget yourself. Our nation has accomplished so much—it will get through. Things do not move so quickly as the younger generation thinks; you must be patient and courageous. With God's help, I believe we shall get through. We shall proceed step by step, but we shall get through, if we are true to ourselves."

Schleicher became more insistent. Again and again he asked for the order for dissolution. After a careful examination of all the circumstances, however, Hindenburg did not feel in a position to comply with Schleicher's wishes. The unavoidable consequence of this refusal was the resignation of the Government on January 30th, 1933. On that same day conversations took place between the Reichspresident, Hugenburg and Hitler, through the good offices of Herr von Papen. Although Hindenburg had not overcome his fear that a government under Hitler's leadership would be forcibly transformed into a party dictatorship, he nevertheless put aside his former objections at the call of duty. Only his nearest relatives and friends knew what mental struggles preceded this decision. The appointment of Hitler meant the renunciation of what was sacred to the old Prussian classes, to whom Hindenburg felt himself bound at heart. But Hindenburg again placed the general welfare before his own wishes, as he had done in 1918. As soon as he perceived, after scrupulous examination, what appeared to be the right thing for Germany, there was, for the old soldier, no further wavering. In the afternoon it



THE FUNERAL PROCESSION AT AILING HINDENBURG'S HOUSE



was announced by wireless that Hitler was appointed Chancellor, and would be entrusted with the formation of a cabinet on a national basis. Herr von Papen undertook the office of Vice-Chancellor and State Commissioner for Prussia, and General von Blomberg replaced Schleicher as Minister of War. The post of Foreign Minister was reserved for Brüning von Nieuwiche, and no change was made in the Ministry of Finance. The new members of the Cabinet were: Dr. Frick, Minister of the Interior, Privy Councillor Hugenberg for Agriculture and Economics, Seldte, the leader of the Steel Helmets, took over the Ministry of Labour, whilst Goering was appointed Reichsminister without portfolio, Reichskommissioner for Air, as well as provisional Minister of the Interior for Prussia. A gigantic torchlight procession of the S.A. and Steel Helmets celebrated this momentous decision in the capital. In the brilliancy of the torchlights, the Reichs-president and the new Chancellor showed themselves to the jubilant Berliners. The rest of Germany also heard this great event by radio.

In Hindenburg's decree of February 1st it was stated: "After the formation of a working majority has proved an impossibility, I, in accordance with Article 25 of the Constitution, dissolve Parliament, so that by the election of a new Parliament, the German people may define their attitude to the formation of the new National Alliance." The General Election was fixed for Sunday, March 5th.

Adolf Hitler also addressed an appeal to the German people and announced the characteristics of the great plan of reorganisation which was to be carried out in two four-year plans. "Within four years," said the Chancellor, "the German peasant must be freed from poverty. Within four years, unemployment must be finally overcome."

The appointment of Hitler did not lead to internal peace. The secret civil war spread; the intrigue of the provinces

against the Reich continued. The situation in Prussia was so threatening that Hindenburg, in accordance with Article 48 of the Constitution, invested the entire powers of the deposed Prussian Government in the Reichs-commissioner for Prussia, and ordered a new election of the Prussian Diet for March 5th. This procedure caused some alarm in the southern provinces of Germany, which feared an attack upon their special rights. In Bavaria, especially, the minds of the people were in a ferment. Irresponsible circles toyed openly and secretly with the idea of a secession from the Reich. Even official circles whispered of the establishment of an independent rule.

When mischievous hands set the Reichstag on fire, the whole situation was illuminated as though by a flash of lightning. This beacon, however, did not light the fires of civil war, but was the signal for a ruthless attack on the Communist enemy. During the same night 5000 Communist leaders and agents were arrested by order of Göring, and thus the danger of civil war was averted. Reichspresident von Hindenburg issued an emergency decree for the protection of the people and the State. This decree automatically invalidated important articles of the Constitution until further notice. The death penalty was threatened for high treason and sabotage. That was the birth of the National Revolution.

The result of the poll on March 5th secured an absolute majority for the National Socialists together with the black-white-red Front Rank Fighters, and confirmed the fact that Hindenburg's decision of January 30th was in accordance with the will of the majority. Events now moved with great speed. To the great joy of the people in Munich, General Ritter von Epp was appointed Reichs-commissioner for Bavaria, and order was established. Homage was also paid to the old German flags which led

us in the war. Beside them flew the swastikas. "These flags," stated Hindenburg's Flag Decree, "connect the glorious past of the German Reich and the vigorous regeneration of the German Nation."

March 21st, the day on which the new Reichstag met for the first time, was a general holiday. The dedication of the Third Reich took place in the time-honoured Garrison Church at Potsdam, and the Reichspresident addressed the Government in the following moving words :

"By my order of February 1st of this year, I dissolved the Reichstag, so that the German people themselves could define their attitude to the new Government of the National Alliance formed by me. In the parliamentary election of March 5th, the German nation has placed itself behind this Government, thus giving it the constitutional foundation for its work. Difficult and manifold are the tasks which you, Herr Reichschancellor, and you, my Ministers, have before you. In the sphere of domestic and international politics, in political economy at home as in the world, there are difficult problems to be solved and important decisions to be taken. I know that both Chancellor and Government will take these tasks in hand with a firm will ; and I expect of you, members of the newly formed Reichstag, that in the clear understanding of the situation and of its necessities, you will stand behind the Government and will do everything possible on your part to support it in its difficult work.

"The spot on which we are assembled to-day brings to mind a retrospective view of the old Prussia, which in the fear of God became great through dutiful labour, undying bravery and invincible love of the Fatherland, and which united the German races on this foundation. May the old spirit of this place of glory inspire the present generation ; may it deliver us from selfishness and party

quarrels, and unite us in national self-consciousness and spiritual renewal for the blessing of a united, free and proud Germany ! With these wishes I salute the Reichstag at the beginning of its new session, and now call upon the Reichschancellor to speak."

Visibly moved, the Chancellor stepped on to the platform to express his thanks to the aged Field-Marshal and to make an appeal to the German nation and to the world : " The world knows only the external picture of our great towns," began the Chancellor, " it does not see the despair and the misery." With plain words Hitler then entered a protest against the war guilt lie : " Neither the Kaiser, nor the Government, nor the people, willed this war. But the decline of the nation, the general collapse, compelled a weak generation, against its own better judgment and against its most sacred convictions, to accept the assertion of our war guilt. While the German people and the German Reich were absorbed in political dissension and disputes, and while the country was face to face with poverty, a new concentration of German people began, people who had unshaken faith in their own nation and desired to form a new union. To this new Germany you have, Herr General Field-Marshal, on the 30th day of January, 1933, by a unanimous decision, entrusted the leadership of the Reich. On the 5th of March, the nation, in its majority, decided to follow us. By a unique upheaval, national honour has been restored in a few weeks, and thanks to your understanding, Herr Reichspresident, the marriage has been consummated between the symbols of the old greatness and the new strength. May you, Ladies and Gentlemen, as representatives of the nation, recognise the tendencies of our time, in order to co-operate in the great work of national restoration.

" We have in our midst to-day an old Chief. We pay

you homage, Herr General Field-Marshal. Three times you have fought on the field of honour for the existence, for the future of our nation. To-day, Herr General Field-Marshal, a protective Providence places you above the new forces in our nation. Your wonderful life is for us all a symbol of the indestructible vitality of our German nation. The German youth, and we with them, thank you to-day for your influence in the work of the advancement of the German peoples. May this vitality be imparted to the representation of the nation now inaugurated ; may Providence also grant us that courage and that perseverance which we feel around us in the atmosphere of this sacred place."

The robust figure stood up ; Hindenburg extended his hand to the Chancellor as though he would set his seal to the solemn words. Hitler made a low bow as he gripped the proffered hand.

Then the organ pealed forth, and the church choir rendered a hymn of triumph, as Hindenburg, unaccompanied, walked into the crypt and placed a wreath on the tomb of Prussia's greatest King. It was a wreath on the grave of ancient Prussianism. Here, in the year 1866, the Field-Marshal had stood as a young lieutenant with his Guards. Now Fate, and a burning anxiety for Germany, had led him again to this spot. Where would the young helmsman who had now taken the tiller steer the Ship of State ? Would he succeed in circumventing the sandbanks and rocks of domestic and international politics and gain the harbour of peace ? The breach with aristocratic Prussia, the Prussia of the Hohenzollerns, was irrevocable. Would Hitler succeed in giving inward peace to the new socialistic Germany, which disavowed every birthright and possession, which aspired to Volksgemeinschaft ; would he succeed in gaining for her the same respect and authority as the old Reich had enjoyed ? These were

probably the thoughts of the old Field-Marshal, as in silent prayer he took his departure from the grave of Frederick the Great.

With Hitler's accession to power the Reichspresident withdrew more and more from the political platform and left the decisions to his chancellor. But when circumstances called for his personal intervention, he appeared before the public with impressive words.

At the Reichstag meeting of March 24th, the Chancellor of the Reich, by acceptance of the statutory law, was invested with the widest powers, and the entire legislation was placed in the hands of the Government. But all decisions affecting the army and navy were reserved for Hindenburg. After March 24th, Adolf Hitler possessed power equal to that held by the Duce in Italy. And Hitler knew how to use this power. All military organisations, with the exception of the S.A. and the S.S. and the Steel Helmets, were disbanded. The installation of National Governors ended public disorder everywhere with one blow. The fight against unemployment was taken up with the greatest energy. An enormous amount of money was available. By July 30th the number of unemployed was reduced by two millions. The Law of Inheritance guaranteed the peasant his ground. The voluntary disbandment of the German National front and the disbandment of the Centre and Bavarian People's Party followed the prohibition of the Social Democratic Party. There was no room in the new Germany for parties and party quarrels. On July 12th, Adolf Hitler proudly declared that the National Revolution was ended. The Concordat concluded between the Holy See and the German Reich on July 8th would in future settle all disputes between Church and State. The conclusion of the Four-Power Pact which was signed at Mussolini's desk

in the Palace at Venice by the Duce, and the Ambassadors of Germany, France and England, was an important international political success.

The pilgrimage to East Prussia toward the end of August, to the Tannenberg Memorial, gave the Government the desired opportunity to express anew its thanks to Hindenburg for his confidence in it. The Memorial at Tannenberg was the destination of more than 1500 motor-coaches from every Province in Germany. The Reichs-president arrived from Neudeck accompanied by the leading men of the Reich, and was greeted with tremendous cheering. Hitler painted a vivid description of the serious danger which threatened East Germany nineteen years previously : " It was not merely a battle that was fought here. The destiny of Germany was in the balance. East Prussia was freed and Germany saved." Then turning to the Reichs-president, the Chancellor continued : " With my whole heart I feel it a gracious gift of Providence to be able to express to you, Herr General Field-Marshal, on the soil of the most glorious battlefield of the Great War, and in the name of the united German nation, our most profound thanks. We are happy that we are able to celebrate this memorable day of triumph with him who won that triumph. The German Government acts for the German people, when it gives expression to the warmest wishes that your name, Herr General Field-Marshal, may live in our nation for ever ; that not only may the stones of this memorial speak of you, but that distant generations to come may testify of their great ancestors and their associations with this sacred soil. The German Government, therefore, as representative of the national honour, and in fulfilment of a duty of national thankfulness, has determined and has made it a law, that that section of this Province, which to-day, Herr General Field-Marshal, is associated with your name, shall remain associated with

the name of Hindenburg as long as there remains a male issue bearing that name."

Tumultuous applause followed this act of homage of the new Germany to the aged marshal. Then Hindenburg began to speak and remembered, first of all, his dead comrades. As a mark of lasting gratitude he laid a laurel-wreath on the cross under which twenty fighters of Tannenberg had found their last resting-place. The rousing song, "The Good Comrade," resounded; peals of bells rang out from all the church-towers of East Prussia; flags were lowered in salute. Then came again Hindenburg's voice, loud and clear: "When I continue to recall the crowded incidents of those days, I think first of all in reverence, fidelity and thankfulness, of my Kaiser, King and Lord, whose confidence and whose command once summoned me to this place. I remember then in undying gratitude my former comrades, from the oldest general to the youngest soldier, who were all inspired by the will to victory, by devotion to the point of sacrifice, for the Fatherland. On this battlefield to-day an honour falls to my lot, for which I should like at once to explain, that I only did my duty. I accept this honour, not on account of my services, but because I see in it a symbol for the firm association of my person and my descendants with the old Prussian soil. I believe that we cannot conclude this solemnisation more worthily than by the pledge of a common purpose in love and faithfulness to the Fatherland, and by the old soldiers' cry which once echoed over this battlefield: 'Germany! Hurrah! Hurrah!! Hurrah!!!'"

The imperishable homogeneity of the Saar and the Reich was also being emphasised at the same time by a great demonstration at the Niederwald memorial.

But the internal growing strength of Germany, expressed in these celebrations, always called into existence more

and more enemies abroad, both open and secret. In the French Press the Niederwald demonstration was reported as an expression of Germany's desire for domination. France endeavoured by all possible means to damage the negotiations of the Disarmament Conference, and by the introduction of a control of armaments, to make illusory the solemnly promised equality of rights. Chancellor Hitler had already expressed at the Reichstag meeting, simultaneously with the announcement of Germany's desire for peace, the hint that "it would be difficult for us, as a continually defamed nation, to continue our membership to the League of Nations. May the other nations at last learn from this the way to terminate a period of human mistakes, and discover the means to this end on the ground of equal rights."

But neither did the stressing of Germany's desire for peace find an echo abroad, nor was the threat seriously taken, that if Germany was denied any longer equality of rights she would withdraw from Geneva.

On the occasion of the fourteenth meeting of the League of Nations in September, Germany demanded emphatically that a beginning should be made with the disarmament of other nations, in accordance with the Versailles Treaty. Germany refused to sign a declaration to the effect that the beginning of disarmament should be made dependent on Germany's good behaviour. This was the starting-point of a real all-round attack against the Reich, in which England took the lead. In view of this humiliating situation, the Reichspräsident was obliged to recall the German delegates from the Disarmament Conference and solemnly declare Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations. In order to give the German nation an opportunity to prove to the world that in this matter it stood firmly behind the Government, the Reichspräsident dissolved the Reichstag and the provincial parliaments,

and fixed a new General Election for November 12th. The order for dissolution which was issued on October 14th, and signed by the Reichspräsident, the Chancellor and the Minister of the Interior, read as follows: "In order to give the German nation an opportunity to define its attitude to the present vital question, and to give expression to its collaboration with the Government, I dissolve the Reichstag in accordance with Article 25 of the Constitution."

And again the deep voice of the Reichspräsident was heard over the wireless, exhorting the German people to unity: "German men and women," cried Hindenburg to the listening millions, "allow me at this hour, when there is a question of the present and future life of Germany, to say a few words.

"I, and the Government, united in the desire to lead Germany out of the chaotic condition and impotence of the post-war years, have called upon the nation to decide its fate to-morrow, and to manifest to the world whether it agrees to the policy proposed by us and will accept it.

"Long years of weakening disunion lie behind us. Thanks to the courageous, clear-sighted and vigorous leadership of Chancellor Hitler—appointed by me on the 30th of January of this year—and his ministers, Germany is on her feet again and has recovered strength to tread the way appointed by her national honour and future. To-morrow, for the first time after long years of divided parties, the German nation will take its stand before the world as a single unit, united in the manifestation of its desire for peace, but also united in its claim for honour, equality of rights, and respect from the other nations. Work and reconstruction at home, peace, honour and equality of rights abroad, are the pillars upon which Germany will establish her public life. We want to preserve our honour, but at the same time we desire and

long for a genuine peace. It is falsehood and slander to impute to us warlike intentions. No one in Germany feels the urge for violent methods. Those who, like myself, have experienced the horrors of war in three campaigns, cannot desire another war, and regard the maintenance of peace as the most urgent duty of Germany and of the whole world. Through the voice of the Reichschancellor the Government has most solemnly assured the other nations that we sincerely desire to come to an understanding. It has repeatedly expressed our willingness to agree heartily with any genuine disarmament of the world, and has declared itself ready for complete disarmament, if other nations decide on a similar course. With our whole heart we want peace, but a peace with honour and equality of rights.

"We have left the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations, not to demonstrate against the idea of a peaceful understanding with the nations, but to show the world that we can no longer go on with the method of differentiating between victors and vanquished, between armed and unarmed States, between free and fettered peoples ; and to show that real understanding and genuine peace is possible only on the ground of equality of rights.

"To you, my German comrades, the call now comes to declare yourselves for this our policy of honour and of peace. To-morrow the entire German peoples will bear witness that they are united in the feeling of national honour, in the demand for equal rights, and at the same time, for genuine and lasting peace. To-morrow all Germans will manifest unitedly, and in an unmistakable manner, that Germany for the future can never again be treated as a second-class nation.

"Therefore I say to all German men and women : 'To-morrow, demonstrate your national unity and honour ; show your confidence in and agreement with the Government.

Follow me and the Chancellor in the principle of the equality of rights and of peace for the world. Show the world that we have recovered and that with God's help we shall hold fast to German Unity ! ' ' "

The answer given by the German people to this call had but one meaning. Of the 43 million votes recorded, 40 million answered with a " Yes ! " "

The civic strife in Austria weighed almost more heavily upon the spirit of the Reichspresident and his people than the threatening attitude of the former enemy powers. The attitude had become so threatening that on June 1st, the Government was compelled to hold up intercourse with the sister country by making a charge of 1000 Marks for *visas*. The Austrian Government replied to this by the immediate adoption of coercive proceedings against the National Socialist movement in Austria. Outrages and arrests were the order of the day.

But the situation at home also caused the Reichspresident grave concern. As a Christian, Hindenburg was troubled, above all, by the disputes which had broken out in the Evangelical Church. So distressed was he that he wrote to Hitler on June 30th as follows : " The dissension in the Evangelical Church and the antagonisms which have arisen between the Prussian Government and the leaders of the Prussian Evangelical Church, fill me, as an Evangelical Christian and as Chief of the State, with grave anxiety. Numerous letters and telegrams which have reached me show that the German Evangelical Christians are most deeply concerned by these antagonisms, and by their anxiety for the freedom of the Church. National unity must suffer, and great damage to the people and to the Fatherland will grow out of a continuance or even an accentuation of this state of affairs. I feel obliged, therefore, before God and my own conscience, to do everything possible to avert such a catastrophe.

" From my interview with you yesterday on this question, Herr Chancellor, I see that you are ready to meet this situation with the fullest appreciation, and assist in bridging the disputes. Therefore I have the confidence that your statesmanlike influence will succeed —through negotiations with the representatives of the conflicting elements in the Evangelical Church and the representatives of the Prussian State Church, as well as with the Prussian Government —in restoring peace in the Evangelical Church, and on this basis bring about the desired unity in the various State churches."

And so the year 1933 came to an end. In spite of all the success at home, in spite of the rapidly increasing fall in unemployment figures, in spite of improvements in agriculture, heavy clouds appeared on the economical and political horizon. The boycott movement against German goods caused severe depression in our export trade, and France's intention to forge an iron ring round Germany became more and more clear.

On the occasion of the New Year reception of the Diplomatic Corps, under the leadership of Nuntius Orsenigo, the Reichspräsident appealed again in the following words to the intelligence of the world: "You have rightly said, Herr Nuntius, that the past year for Germany was exceedingly rich in events of far-reaching importance. The year 1933 must indeed be marked as a turning-point in the history of Germany. The German nation has, within a short period, experienced a spiritual and moral regeneration. After long years of distress and suffering it has awakened to a new courage to face life. The conscientious conduct of the State, supported by the confidence and by the willing sacrifices of the people, have made it possible to check the increasing poverty of the population. Hatred, born of domestic bickerings among political partisans within the nation, is banished. Above all, German

agriculture looks forward again with great hope, to a better future. This recovery of a great country will—of that I am fully convinced—bring about an assurance of peace and of international welfare. You yourself, Herr Nuntius, have referred to the Peace Policy which the Government has solemnly proclaimed. I, who, as an old soldier, have experienced the horrors of three wars, know that the Government and people want nothing so much as to live in agreement with all other nations, on the basis of honour and equality of rights. With the German equality of rights, the confidence will also be restored, that such equality constitutes an indispensable basis for the fruitful co-operation of the Government.”

But the world turned a deaf ear to these words. The war spirit was not dead. Instead of disarming, the whole world increased armaments. The manufacture of arms became a flourishing industry. In the east, owing to the dispute over the Eastern Chinese Railway, the long-dormant antagonism between Japan and Soviet Russia almost came to an open breach. Both countries were engaged in important preparations for war. The ever-widening dispute between Germany and Austria was utilised by Italy, at first with the tacit consent of France, then with more open support, with the object of securing a more advantageous position in the Danubian territory. Rome, Vienna and Budapest agreed upon a uniform international programme. Daladier's Government fell, and Doumergue stepped into his place, but the attitude against Germany became still more unfriendly. The French Foreign Minister, Barthou, worked very hard in order to tighten the ring round Germany. The cries of alarm for France's threatened security were irrepressible.

In Geneva negotiations were on foot regarding the Saar Plebiscite. Germany, faithful to its word, remained aloof.

It did not leave the League of Nations only to go there again at the desire of the other nations. It would remain aloof as long as its right to equality was not recognised. Neither was its presence necessary. The task which the legal adviser to the League had to perform, was so simple, the German legal claim so clear, that its acceptance depended merely upon the legal adviser fulfilling his duties loyally. But in spite of this clear state of affairs, the negotiations dragged on month after month. Only at the end of May was it decided to fix January 15th, 1935, as the date of the plebiscite in the Saar territory. The only international political ray of light was the conclusion of the ten-year pact between Germany and Poland, as a result of which both countries bound themselves to settle all questions by direct peaceful agreement. But even this step towards the peace of Europe, by which Germany manifested its peaceful intentions, was accepted in France with open uneasiness. Barthou himself went to Warsaw, in order to appeal to the conscience of the members of the League. Nay, the fear of a reinforced Germany caused France, in spite of every misgiving, to seek a political and military alliance with Russia. Germany was at liberty to enter into a pact in the east, in the same way as was already the case with the west and the south. In the whole of Europe, there was the same tension as ruled before the outbreak of war.

With faith stronger than ever, the German nation looked to the Reichspresident. The respect for Hindenburg was so great in the world, his word carried such weight ; he would soon find the right way to overcome finally the suspicion of the foreign countries. It was with grave concern, therefore, that the first faint rumours of an illness of the Reichspresident were received. An old wound became active again, and an operation seemed inevitable. On account of the advanced age of the Reichspresident,

the doctors at first hesitated. Finally, however, an operation was decided upon, and Hindenburg, by reason of his enormous strength, came through it successfully. Neudeck brought him complete convalescence.

In order to end the dispute with Austria, the Chancellor decided to have a personal interview with Mussolini. On June 14th both leaders met in Venice in order to find ways and means to settle the conflict between the Reich and the sister country. Hopeful comments appeared in the Italian as well as in the German Press. Hitler returned, satisfied with the result of his conversations with the Duce, to make his report to the Reichspresident.

But there was no peace for Germany. A serious danger now threatened the country. Rumours were circulating of quarrels within the ranks of the S.A.—of a second revolution. Rudolf Hess spoke emphatically of the dangerous game of toying with a fresh revolution. But the plotters would not listen to him. The tension became greater and greater. Finally, on June 30th, Hitler felt obliged to take matters into his own hands. In Berlin and Munich the S.A. were mobilised under false pretences. Thunder was in the air. Flying from Coblenz, Hitler arrived in Munich just in time to avert an outbreak of civil war. Roehm and numerous other S.A. leaders were arrested and shot. At the same time General Goring carried out an equally thorough purging in Berlin. General von Schleicher was also said to have been involved in the plot, and was shot while resisting arrest, a stray bullet killing his wife also. Abroad, this was a fresh occasion for a fresh outburst of hatred against Germany. The newspapers reported that thousands were dead. But even then the Reichspresident defended his Chancellor. On July 2nd he sent the following telegram to Hitler from Neudeck: "From the reports placed before me, I learn that you, by your determined action and your brave

personal intervention, have nipped treason in the bud. You have saved the German nation from serious danger. For this I express to you my most profound thanks and my sincere appreciation."

The Reichstag was summoned, and Hitler spoke to the whole world of the origin and suppression of the Roehm revolt. Quiet was gradually being restored when June 26th brought news of a shocking tragedy—Chancellor Dollfuss had been assassinated. Even this act was said by foreign countries to have been engineered by Germany. The Italian Press especially excelled itself in wild attacks against the Reich. Sixty thousand Italian troops were ready to march across the Austrian frontier. As a proof of its loathing of the assassins the German Government closed the Austrian frontier, and gave the order to arrest immediately anyone attempting to cross the border.

In the midst of these stormy scenes, the first news of another serious illness of the Reichspresident was published. On July 31st the following bulletin was issued by Dr. Professor Sauerbruch, Dr. Krauss, Dr. Adam and Professor Kaufmann : " Reichspresident von Hindenburg, who had been suffering for some months, had made a satisfactory recovery in Neudeck. In full mental vigour and physical strength, he discharged the duties of his office, and even until yesterday was able to receive reports. A slight physical weakness, which was noticed a few days ago, has, however, become worse. Owing to the advanced age of the Field-Marshal, there is ground for grave concern. The doctors are remaining in Neudeck. Further bulletins will follow."

Millions of Germans read this tragic news as though paralysed. In view of the advanced age of the Reichspresident, the possibility of his death certainly had to be faced. Was Germany, just at this critical moment, to lose

its truest and most faithful supporter? Anxious hours passed between hope and fear.

The innumerable prayers which ascended to Heaven from believing hearts in quiet rooms, were in vain. "The condition of the Herr Reichspresident has grown worse. He is unconscious. The heart is weakening," ran the bulletin issued by Professor Sauerbruch on the evening of August 1st.

On August 2nd, at 9.15 a.m.—exactly twenty years after the outbreak of the World War which had led the Field-Marshal to the head of the army and later to the head of the State—the blue-and-white flag on Neudeck Castle was lowered to half-mast. The strong heart had stopped beating. At 9.25 a.m. all German broadcasting stations were suddenly silenced. After a short pause Dr. Goebbels announced: "Reichspresident General Field-Marshal von Hindenburg passed into eternity at 9 a.m. to-day."

Half an hour later Dr. Goebbels came to the microphone again and read a decree which the Government had passed the previous evening: "The Office of Reichspresident will be united to that of Reichschancellor. Consequently the powers of Reichspresident pass over to the Leader and Reichschancellor, Adolf Hitler. He will appoint his representatives. This Law comes into force from the time of the death of the Reichspresident in power." At the same time, extensive orders were given for general mourning and for a State funeral, such as is rarely given even to a monarch.

Thousands of messages of condolence, which testified to the respect the aged Reichspresident enjoyed in all parts of the world, were received by Colonel von Hindenburg and the Chancellor. But it was not these outward signs of mourning that were most touching; it was the sincere grief which could be seen in the eyes of every German. Only those who were alive at the death of Wilhelm I and

of his great Chancellor, had ever witnessed such a scene ; a scene of general mourning throughout the length and breadth of the land. Every single German had the feeling that his own father had died.

“ *Vivere militare est* ” (“ To live is to fight.”) These words might be placed as a motto over the biographical sketch of Paul von Hindenburg. As a soldier he had fought in three wars. And after the Armistice his sturdy spirit overcame the Revolution which threatened to shatter Germany in 1918. During his nine years as President he fought a continuous battle against distress and poverty—a battle for honour and for equal rights. But Hindenburg fought the hardest battle of all with his conscience, in order—however much sentiment and tradition were opposed to an inevitable decision—to do always what he believed to be his duty.

* * * * *

In Neudeck in the old park and in the Castle, all is quiet. All streets are closed to traffic. Only the nearest relatives are gathered in the death-chamber, where the great man, his hands folded, peacefully rests after a life crowded with honour and success, crowded still more with care and trouble. Soon, however, the Reichswehr approaches, to take over duty as guard-of-honour. The Castle is filled with flowers from all parts of the world. Even the Kaiser sends his great Field-Marshal a wreath, by the hand of his son, the ex-Crown Prince. And then follows an unending number of mourners.

Many years ago Hindenburg had expressed the wish that, once his eyes were closed, he would be laid to rest next to his true life-partner, under his beloved old trees in the quiet family churchyard in Neudeck Park. He had also decided on his own epitaph : “ On my grave there is to be merely a rough stone, on which only ‘ Hindenburg ’ is

engraved ; nothing modern, elaborate or gaudy. On the other side of the stone you can write, if you like : ‘ Letters no longer accepted,’ for since 1914 I have been tormented with them far too much.”

But the head of a state is not a private individual. Even after death he still belongs to the nation. During the night of August 6th, a funeral procession, escorted by the light of thousands of torchlights, bore the earthly remains of the Reichspräsident to the great Memorial at Tannenberg, in whose crypt the greatest of all Germans found his last resting-place.

Hindenburg’s will, which Vice-Chancellor von Papen delivered to the Leader at the request of Colonel von Hindenburg on August 15th, was as follows :

“ To the German Nation and to its Chancellor, my testament.

“ In 1919 I wrote in my message to the German Nation : ‘ We were at the end ! Like Siegfried under the cunning javelin of the furious Hagen, our exhausted front collapsed. In vain had we endeavoured to drink new life from the perennial spring of native strength. It was our task now, to save the remaining strength of our army for the later reconstruction of the Fatherland. The present was lost. There remained now only hope—and the future !

“ ‘ I understand the idea of escape from the world, which obsessed many officers, in view of the collapse of all that was dear and true to them. The desire to know nothing more of a world where seething passions obscured the vital qualities of our nation so that they could no longer be recognised, is humanly conceivable. And yet—but I must express it frankly, just as I think ! Comrades of the once grand, proud German army ! Can you speak of losing heart ? Think of the men who more than a hundred years ago created for us a new Fatherland. Their religion was their faith in themselves and in the

sanctity of their cause. They created the new Fatherland, basing it not on freak doctrinaire theories foreign to our nature, but building it up on the foundations of the free development of the framework and of the principles of our own common weal ! When it is able, Germany will go along this way again.

“ I have the firm conviction that now, as in those times, the links with our great rich past will be preserved, and, where they have been broken, will be restored. The old German spirit will again assert itself triumphantly, though only after thorough purgings in the fires of suffering and passion.

“ Our opponents knew the strength of this spirit ; they admired and hated it in times of peace ; they were astonished at it and feared it on the battlefields of the Great War. They sought to explain our strength to their peoples by using the empty word “ Organisation.” They passed over in silence the spirit which lived and moved behind the veil of this word. But in and with this spirit we will again courageously construct.

“ Germany, the focus point of so many of the inexhaustible values of human civilisation and culture, will not go under so long as it retains faith in its great historical world mission. I have the sure confidence that the depth and strength of thought of the best in our Fatherland, will succeed in blending new ideas with the precious treasures of former times and from them will forge in concert, lasting values for the welfare of our Fatherland.

“ This is the unshakable conviction with which I leave the bloody battlefield of international warfare. I have seen the heroic agony of my Fatherland and never, never will believe that it was its death agony.

“ For the present our entire former constitution lies buried under the flood-tide, raised by the storm of wild political passions and resounding phrases which has

apparently destroyed all sacred traditions. But this flood-tide will subside. Then, from the eternally agitated sea of human life, will again emerge that rock to which the hope of our fathers clung, that rock upon which, nearly half a century ago, the future of our Fatherland was, by our strength, confidently founded - the German Empire! When the national idea, the national consciousness, has again been raised, then, out of the Great War - on which no nation can look back with such legitimate pride and with such clear conscience as we - as well as out of the bitter severity of the present days, precious moral fruits will ripen for us. The blood of all those who have fallen in the faith of the greatness of the Fatherland, will not then have flowed in vain. In this assurance I lay down my pen and rely firmly on you—the Youth of Germany.'

"I wrote these words in the darkest hours and in the conviction that I was fast approaching the close of a life spent in the service of the Fatherland. Fate disposed otherwise for me. In the spring of 1925 a new chapter of my life was opened. Again I was wanted to co-operate in the destiny of my nation. Only my firm confidence in Germany's inexhaustible resources, gave me the courage to accept the office of Reichspresident. This firm belief lent me also the moral strength to fulfil unswervingly the duties of that difficult position.

"The last chapter of my life has been for me, at the same time, the most difficult. Many have not understood me in these troublous times and have not comprehended that my only anxiety was to lead the distracted and discouraged German nation back to self-conscious unity.

"I began and conducted the duties of my office in the consciousness that a preparatory period of complete renunciation was necessary in domestic and international politics. From the Easter message of the year 1925—in

which I exhorted the nation to the fear of God, to social justice, to internal peace and political sanity—onwards, I have not become tired of cultivating the inward unity of our nation and the self-consciousness of its best qualities. Moreover, I was conscious that the political constitution and form of Government which were provided for the nation in the hour of its greatest distress and greatest weakness, did not correspond with the requirements and characteristics of our people. The time must arrive when this knowledge would become general. It therefore seemed my duty to rescue the country from the morass of external oppression and degradation, internal distress and self-disruption, without jeopardising its existence, before this hour struck.

“The guardian of the State, the Reichswehr, must be the symbol and firm support for this superstructure. On the Reichswehr as a firm foundation, must rest the old Prussian virtues of self-realised dutifulness, of simplicity and comradeship. The German Reichswehr had, after the collapse, cultivated the continuation of the high traditions of the old army in typical style. Always and at all times the Reichswehr must remain the pattern of State conduct, so that, unbiased by any internal political development, its lofty mission for the defence of the country may be put to good account.

“When I shall have returned to my comrades above, with whom I have fought on so many battlefields for the honour and glory of the Nation, then I shall call to the younger generation :

“ ‘ Show yourselves worthy of your ancestors, and never forget, if you would secure the peace and well-being of your native country, that you must be prepared to give up everything for its peace and honour. Never forget that your deeds will one day become Tradition.’ ”

“The thanks of the Field-Marshal of the World War and

its Commander-in-Chief, are due to all the men who have accomplished the construction and organisation of the Reichswehr.

"Internationally the German nation had to wander through a Gethsemane. A frightful treaty weighed heavily upon it, and in its increasingly evil effects threatened to bring about the collapse of our nation. For a long time the surrounding world did not understand that Germany must live, not only for its own sake, but also for the sake of Europe and as the standard-bearer of western culture. Only step by step, without awaking an overwhelming resistance, were the fetters which surrounded us to be loosened. If many of my comrades at that time did not understand the difficulties that beset our path, history will certainly judge rightly, how severe but also how necessary in the interests of the maintenance of German existence, was many a State act signed by me.

"In unison with the growing internal recovery and strengthening of the German nation, a progressive and—God willing—a generous contribution towards the solution of all troublesome European questions, could be striven after and obtained, on the basis of its own national honour and dignity. I am thankful to Providence that, in the evening of my life, I have been allowed to see this hour of the nation's renewal of strength. I thank all those who, by unselfish devotion to the Fatherland, have co-operated with me in the reconstruction of Germany. My Chancellor, Adolf Hitler, and his movement, have together led the German nation above all professional and class distinctions, to internal unity—a decided step of historical importance. I know that much remains to be done, and I desire with my whole heart that the act of reconciliation which embraces the entire German Fatherland, may be the forerunner of the act of national exaltation and national co-operation.

" I depart from my German people in the full hope that what I longed for in the year 1919, and which was coming slowly to fruition in January, 1933, may mature to the complete fulfilment and perfection of the historical mission of our nation.

" In this firm belief in the future of the Fatherland, I close my eyes in calm.

" Berlin, May 11th, 1934.

" VON HINDENBURG."

As it was not vouchsafed to the Field-Marshal to lead the World War to a victorious conclusion, so the Reichs-president was also not able to present to his country the urgently desired peace and universal equality of rights. Severe struggles for Germany were imminent. Nobody was able to say how the struggle would end. But although Hindenburg was not allowed to see the victory, surely the proud words of General von Clausewitz applied to him :

" One day posterity will judge and will exempt from its condemnation those who have courageously weathered the storm of adversity and have preserved the sense of duty in their own hearts."

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